THE GLORIOUS JOURNEY

(Maha-Prasthana)

A SPIRITUAL EXPOSITION OF THE MAHABHARATA

By

SRI SWAMI SANKARANANDA

Published by

The Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy,

THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

P.O. Shivananda Nagar,

Rishikesh Himalayas

1960

Price) (Rs. 2

THE AUTHOR

Sri Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, who will be sixty on the 13th May, 1960. is a versatile genius. It is extremely rare nowadays to find one who so beautifully blends in himself the scholar and the Sevak, for whom cooking or scavenging, building construction or administration of an institution, and thinking and writing on subtle philosophical subjects, would all be natural and therefore dear.

Sankaranandaji is a linguist and has utilised his mastery of Bengali literature to interpret Tagore's works to the people of Karnataka where he was born. He has also translated several of Sri Swami Sivanandaji's works into Canarese.

Since he joined the Sivananda Ashram in 1946 he has not spared himself in the service of the Master. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj initiated him into the Holy Order of Sannyasa on "Sankara Jayanti day" 1948. Since then Sankaranandaji has served the Master's Cause with a rare zeal and spirit of dedication.

He has distinguished himself in several dapartments of the Ashram. The Society's Garden at Rishikesh owes its growth to him.

Side by side, he has carried on his literary activities. Recently at the invitation of the Mysore University, he delivered a series of lectures on Bangali Literature. At the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy, too, he delivered a series of lectures on the spiritual significance of the Mahabharata which have been brought together in this volume.

His talks and writings share the nature of his life itself: they are all thought-provoking.

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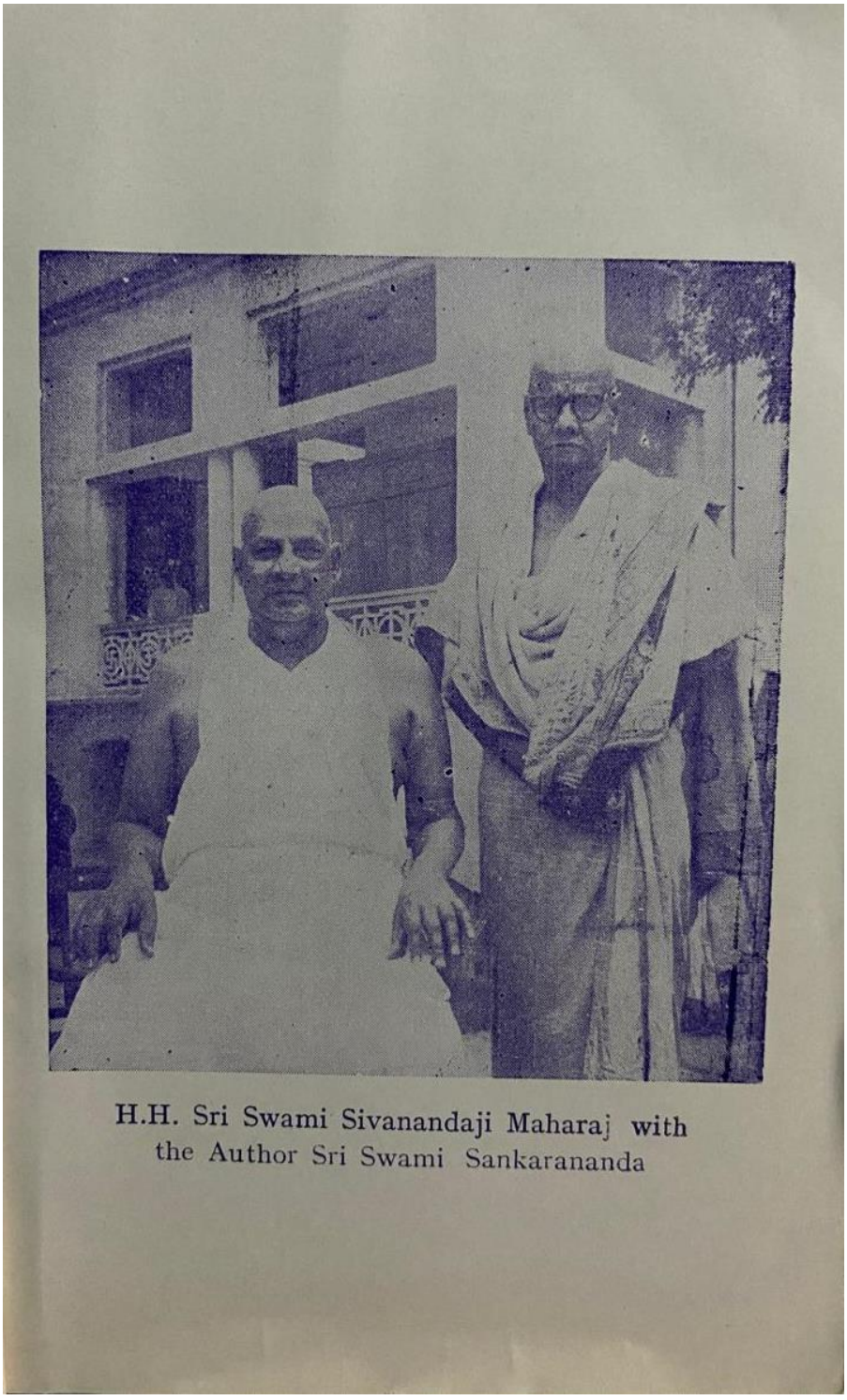

H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj with
the Author Sri Swami Sankarananda

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This highly interesting interpretation of the Maha Bharata was given by Sri Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, during the course of his lectures given at the Satsangha at the Sivarlandashram, for the benefit of the students of the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy. The discourses were very well received: and there was a holy command from His Holiness Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj that they should be published in book-form for the benefit of students abroad.

This volume is the outcome.

This volume is published in commemoration of the illustrious author's Sashti-abda-poorthy (Birth-day Diamond Jubilee) celebrated on the 13th May, 1960.

Publisher's

FOREWORD

Salutations to Lord Sri Krishna, the Ruler of the universe, the greatest Yogeshwara, the beloved of the Gopis, the protector of the good and destroyer of wickedness! Salutations to the Immortal Sri Vyasa Bhagavan!

One cannot think of Maha Bharata and Srimad Bhagavata, without being wonderstruck at their universal appeal. From a child who loves to listen to stories, to the greatest Yogi who forever remains immersed in the Lord, everyone can derive the greatest joy and peace from a study of these scriptures. Who but God Himself can conceive of such scriptures?

The allegorical explanation given in this volume does not cancel the historicty of the Maha Bharata.
On the contrary, it only enhances the significance and importance of the historical events of the Maha Bharata: these epochal events in the Divine

Plan serve His children in a variety of ways. They teach man, his lessons in righteous conduct: what to do and what not to do. They teach Man the art of living: how to attain the four Purusharthas –Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. They teach man his duties, and give him detailed instructions on his duties at various stages in his life and in various situations. Above all, they have in them invaluable lessons for a Yoga-aspirant.

In this volume Sri Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj has beautifully brought out this multifaceted glory of the Maha Bharata. He has rendered a distinct service to spiritual aspirants all over the world by his wonderful, thought-provoking spiritual interpretation of the scripture. I have no doubt it will inspire many people to study the scripture and walk the path of righteousness.

Speak the truth.. Do not commit sin, in a vain attempt to get happiness from sensual enjoyments.
Be pure. Be noble. Be humble.. Be tolerant. Love all: do not treat anyone as your enemy. Do total self-surrender to the Lord. Live in tune with the Divine Will.. Satyameva Jayate, is the central teaching of the Maha Bharata. Utilise every moment in remembrance of the Lord and in the selfless service of humanity. Thus will you be able to exalt your life. You must attain God in this very birth, nay this very moment. Tat Twam Asi, That Immortal, Satchidananda Atman you are: not this preishable body, not this deluded intellect. Arise, awake and realise the Self, not in the unknown future, but right now, this very second..

May God bless you all! May God bless Sri Swami Sankaranandaji with health, long life, peace prosperity and Kaivalya Moksha!

A TRIBUTE OF APPRECIATION

(Sri K.S. Ramaswamy Sastriar, Retd. Judge Madras)

I feel it to be a high privilege and rare honour to pen a foreword to this spiritually fascinating and fascinatingly spiritual work "The Glorious Journey"

by H.H. Sri Swami Shankarananda. The ever glorious H.H. Swami Sivananda has written an illuminating foreword to it and so I call mine an apprecia tive tribute.

Our beloved motherland owes its name to the Bharata line of Kings: अरदानां तमहज्जम माहाभारतमुच्ये Kalidasa says that Bharata was called Sarvadamana (सवदमन) i.e., the subduer of all, when he was a boy (भरतो लोकस्य भरणात्). from 'subduer' to 'sustainer'! What a lofty ascent! That is India's qualification and destiny. She is the giver of spiritual exaltation to all.

What is elsewhere everywhere will be found in the Mahabharata; what is not found here will not be found anywhere else.

यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्न हास्ति न तत्कचित्

Mahabharata is Bharata-Desa and Bharata-Desa is Mahabharata.

What are the lessons taught by Vyasa and sum marised in this excellent work? Dharma comes from God; Victory comes from Dharma, wealth and power come from Dharma; never give up Dharma; Dharma is eternal; the soul is eternal.

यतः कृष्णस्ततो धर्मो यतो धर्मस्ततो जयः ।
धर्मादर्थञ्च कामञ्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ।।

न जातु कामान्न भयान्न लोभात् ।
धर्म व्यजेत् जीवितस्यापि हेतोः ।।

धर्मो नित्यः सुखदुःखे ह्यनित्ये !

जीवो नित्यो हेतुरस्य त्वनित्यः ।।

(Bharata-Savitri)

Bhagawan says:

मुनीनामप्यहं व्यासः ।

मम प्राणा हि पाण्डवाः ।

पाण्डवानां धनंजयः ।

(I am Vyasa among the sages. The Pandavas are my life. I am Arjuna among the Pandavas). Let us walk in the footsteps of the Pandavas and get the heroism of Arjuna (Nara) and the grace of Sri Krishna (Narayana).

नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमम् ।

देवीं सरस्वतीं व्यासं ततो जयमुदीरयेत् ।

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुधीरः

तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ।।

K.S. Ramaswami Sastri

Madras,
5th May, 1960.

APOLOGIA

This little book does not attempt to be more than a preliminary study of a forgotten approach to the Mahabharata. It is based on a series of lectures ofirst delivered in 1954 at Sivanandashram and other places, and bears

many of the shortcomings of lectures. Other work has occupied the writer over three years, and the matter has been lying uncompleted as a series of rough notes until at the command of H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the notes have been revised and are now presented to the public. The writer finds it difficult to express the depth of his gratitude for the kindness and unfailing encouragement of Sri Gurudev.

Many people have expressed great interest in this approach to the essence of the Mahabharata, and it is felt that even a preliminary study may be a stimulus to others to take the matter further in their own individual ways.

Only the barest synopsis has been given of the course of the action of the spice and only leading interpretatinons are submitted. More material exists, but the writer feels that it will be confusing to present too much in one introductory volume; and he hopes to interest both the scholar and the casual reader approaching the Mahabharata for the first time.

Many may be led to a deeper study of this grand Epic. The Bhagavada-Gita section is rightly celebrated, but many have ignored the framework in which it is placed, and of which it is an integral part. The writer hopes that he may be the means of attracting closer attention to the Mahabharata and its spiritual lessons, the most glorious writings of the past.

—Swami Sankarananda

THE GLORIOUS JOURNEY

(Maha-Prasthana)

CHAPTER ONE

THE PATH TOWARD PERFECTION

Om Namah Sivanandaya

The question as to how one should carry on one's worldly life comes up at some time or other in the course of our journey through life. There is a verse in the Maha Bharata, as a guide to show us how we should live:

दिवसेनैव तत्कुर्यात् येन रात्रौ सुखं वसेत् ।

अष्टमासेन तत्कुर्यात् येन वर्षे सुखं वसेत् ।।

पूर्वे वयसि तत्कुर्यात् येन वृद्धः सुखं वसेत्

यावज्जीवं तुतत्कुर्यात् येन प्रेत्य सुखं वसेत् ।।

M.Bh. 5-35-79-80

(Do that in the daytime by which you will be happy at night; do that during the eight months of the year that will give you happiness in the four months of the rainy season; do that in youth which assures you comfort in old age;

do that throughout your life which will bring happiness to you in the life hereafter.)

The Vedas and the Upanishads teach us the path to tread in this life that will bring us happiness in the next. But the understanding of the Vedas and Upanishads means life-long study under a qualified teacher. The Puranas (Epics) and Upa Puranas (Supplementary Epics) seem to have come into existence to assist the student of the Vedas and Upanishads. The subject-matter of almost all

these Puranas and Upa Puranas has been the war between the celestial beings and the demons. Of course, the aim of these works is to teach the science of war between Good and Evil and the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil. The characters are mythical and the language cryptic. At this stage there was a necessity for works dealing with the life and doings of human beings; as a result, the Ramayana and the Maha Bharata appeared. These books are known as Itihasas. Each successive work in this heritage of knowledge is supplementary and complementary to the earlier ones.

The author of KAVYA PRAKASA has said: "Dandapoopikaya Ramayana Bharatadi Parigraha."
(The Ramayana and the Maha Bharata have to be accepted as Danda Apoopa.)

The idea is that if one understands the Rama- yana and the Maha Bharata very well, he will be able to understand the Vedas and the Upanishads. The Maha Bharata is really a Danda on which the sweet teachings of all spiritual knowledge is strung together.

Vyasa Bhagawan has said in the Maha Bharata:

इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबु हयेत् ।

विभेत्यल्पश्रुताद्वेदो मामर्य प्रहरिष्यति ।।

(The Itihasas and the Puranas form the com- pletion of the Vedas. The Vedas are afraid of a person who has not read these works and says 'This person will murder us on account of his incomplete knowledge.')

While the teachings of most of the principal Upanishads are incorporated in the Maha Bharata in the shape of stories and conversations, specific references are made to some Upanishads at the commencement of some of the episodes. In several cases the Upanishadic teachings are explained more elaborately.

The Ramayana narrates the journey through life of an ideal human being. The Hero undergoes many difficulties, but always keeps in mind that Divinity is supreme and that Man is only a puppet in the hands of the Lord. The essence of Ramayana is explained in one verse thus:

सकृदेव प्रपन्नाय तवास्मीति च याचते ।

अभयं सर्वभूतेभ्यो ददाम्येतद्व्रतं मम ।। वा.रा. 6.18-33-34

(If a person surrenders to Me only once and begs: 'O Lord, I am Thine', I will free him from fear of all creation.)

Sri Krishna has declared in the Bhagavad Gita:

अनन्याश्चिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते ।

तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥ GITA 19-22

(If one worships me without thinking of any- thing else, ever united in Me, I will take care of him, provide him with what he needs, and protect what he has.)

The Maha Bharata is a striking illustration of the fate of a person (Yudhishthira) following in thought, word and deed, the above teaching of Sri Krishna.

At the end of the Ramayana, describing Rama Rajya, the poet has said:

न पर्यदेवन् विधवा न च व्यालकृतं भयम् ।

न व्याधिजं भयं वापि रामे राज्यं प्रशासति ।।

निदेस्युरभवल्लोको नानर्थः कंचिदस्पृशत् ।

नच स्म वृद्धा बालानां प्रेतकार्याणि कुर्वते ।।

आसन् प्रजा धर्मरता रामे शासति नानृताः । वा० रा० 6-131-98-99

(In Rama Rajya destitute widows did not exist, sickness and epidemics were not experienced, death from poisonous reptiles did not occur, elders did not perform the funeral ceremonies of the young. The land was free from maurauding exploits; people were treading the path of virtue and were not uttering lies, during Rama's Rule.)

In the Virata Parva of the Maha Bharata, some verses describe the condition of the land where Yudhishthira lived:

तत्र तात न तेषां हि राज्ञां भाव्यमसांप्रतम् ।

पुरे जनपदे चापि यत्र राजा युधिष्ठिरः ।।

नासूयको न चापिषुः नाभिमानी न मत्सरी ।

दृष्टपुष्टजनास्तत्र स्वयं धर्ममनुव्रताः ।

गावश्ववहुलास्तत्र न कृशा न च दुर्बलाः ।।

सम्पन्नसस्या च मही यत्र राजा युधिष्ठिरः। M. Bh. 4-31

(Sons, heads of townships, districts, territories or states, will never have inauspicious thoughts in the land where Yudhishthira lives. The jealous persons, hateful persons, egoistic ones, are not found
there. People are healthy and follow the path of Dharma of their own accord. Cattle will be found in plenty and will be neither weak nor emaciated where King Yudhishthira dwells.)

In other words, the Ramayana narrates the Pravritti Marga (the path of Action) and the Maha Bharata illustrates the Nivritti Marga (the path of Renunciation, the path where the devotee totally surrenders to the Lord and acts as He directs.)

A peculiarity may be noticed in the composition of these works teaching the Science of Reality. The Puranas are eighteen in number. The Upa Puranas (Supplementary Puranas) are eighteen in number. The Maha Bharata consists of eighteen Parvas. The Bhagavad Gita which is a portion of the Maha Bharata, has eighteen chapters. The total strength of the combined armies of the two warring parties was eighteen Akshouhinees. The word JAYA in the invocatory verse of the Maha Bharata according to the Ka Ta Pa Ya method, means eighteen. This repetition of eighteen has a special significance.

The goal of human life is merging with the Supreme Being. The human body is a composition of eighteen aspects:

इन्द्रियाणि च भावाश्च गुणाः सप्तदश स्मृताः ।

तेषामष्टादशे देही यः शरीरे स शाश्वतः ।। M Bh. 11-282-24

(The ten senses, the four modifications of the mind; the three Gunas combined, count seventeen. Then there is the Dehi, the Indweller, the eighteenth, Who is Immortal.)

Overcoming one by one the seventeen mortal ones, the seeker realises the Eighteenth, the In-mdweller. The significance of eighteen in these works is that they show us the path towards perfection, or the path to attain the Self, the eighteenth.

A clear understanding of the style of language used in the different episodes is essential in order to understand the scheme of the Maha Bharata. The great author has said in the first chapter, addressing Brahman regarding the contents of his proposed work:

ब्रह्मन्वेद रहस्यं च यच्चान्यत् स्थापितं मया ।

साङ्गोपनिषदां चैव वेदानां विस्तरक्रिया ।।

इतिहासपुराणानामुन्मेषं निमिषं च यत् ।

भूतं भव्यं भविष्यञ्च त्रिविधं कालसंशितम् ।।

जरामृत्युभयव्याधिभावाभावविनिश्वयः ।

विविधस्य च धर्मस्य ह्याश्रमाणां च लक्षणम् ।।

चातुर्वण्यविधानं च पुराणानां च कृत्स्नशः ।

तपसो ब्रह्मचर्यस्य पृथिव्याश्चन्द्रसूर्ययोः ।।

ग्रहनक्षत्रताराणां प्रमाणं च युगैः सह ।

ऋचो यजूंषि सामानि वेदाध्यात्मं तथैव च ।

न्यायशिक्षा चिकित्सा च दानं पाशुपतं तथा ।।

हेतुनैव समं जन्म दिव्यमानुषसंज्ञितम् ।

तीर्थानां चैव पुण्यानां देवानां चैव कीर्तनम् ।।

नदीनां पर्वतानां च बनांनां सागरस्य च ।

पुराणां चैव दिव्यानां कल्पानां युद्धकौशलम् ।

वाक्यजातिविशेषाश्च लोकयात्राक्रमश्च यः ।।

यच्चापि सर्वगं वस्तु तच्चैव प्रतिपादितम् ।

।परं न लेखकः कश्चिदेतस्य भुवि विद्यते ॥ M.B. 1-1-87 to 95

(Sire, the secrets of the Vedas, established by me elsewhere, the teachings of the Upanishads, de-mtails of the Vedic rituals, the subtle teachings of the Itihasa and Puranas, knowledge of the triple indications-past, present and future of time, definite specifications of old age, death, fear and diseases, the particulars of the duties prescribed to the different Ashramas, details of the classification of the four castes, directions for maintaining austerities and celibacy, particulars of the influences and movements of the planets, the sun, the moon and the earth, the spiritual teachings of the Vedas, logic, medical science, rules of charity, the Pasupata religion, details of celestial and human life, descriptions of sacred rivers, countries and places, the science of war, the style of the science of language and speech, the way of conducting worldly life-all these are included in this work. There is nothing more to be written, existing in the world.)

Concluding, the author has said:

यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यन्नेहास्ति तन्न कुत्रचित् । (आदिपर्व)

(What is said here, you find elsewhere; what is not here, is nowhere else.)

Observing the number of subjects dealt with in the book, it is absolutely essential to have some knowledge of the function of the style and language; otherwise this monumental work may appear only as a

jumble of ideas (as one modern critic has character- ised the work!)

The language of the epics has different aspects. All episodes explained in the epics are allegorical and have an underlying meaning. For example, there is the Jarasandha Akhyana in the Sabha Parva (second book):

"The king of a state has two queens. They give birth to two half pieces of a child. Finding the pieces lifeless, they are thrown on to a dungheap An ogress named Jara comes there and takes up the pieces to eat. When she joins them the united child becomes alive. The ogress leaves the child and runs away. The child's cries attract the attention of the palace servants. They carry it to the King. He is pleased and names it Jarasandha, as it was united by Jara. This child grows up, ascends his father's throne and becomes a powerful king. But he hates Sri Krishna. At the time of the Rajasuya Yajna, Sri Krishna takes Arjuna and Bhima with him and goes to Jarasandha's capital. They challenge Jarasandha to single combat with one of them. He selects Bhima. In the ensuing duel Bhima tears Jrasandha in two, and throws the pieces away, but they unite again. Then Sri Krishna directs Bhima to throw the pieces topsy-turvy. Bhima does so and Jarasandha dies.

This episode is an allegory. The King is the Supreme Being, the Creator: the two Queens are two aspects of Prakriti. One begets the Deha__ human body, and the other delivers the Jiva –the individual soul. The ogress Jara is old age; she unites these two. This Jarasandha grows very powerful and spends his energy and time in pleasures of the body. The goal of the individual soul is merging with the Supreme Soul. Lord Krishna, the Indweller, is kind and endows intellect to the Jiva to try to annihilate the enemy. The Vedantin overcomes this demon by treating all aspects of the world as dream. The Yogi controls the Prana and Apana Vayus through Asana Siddhi and Bandhas, separates the united one, throws the Jiva towards the Lord and the Deha towards earthly duties. When the body is

devoted to earthly duties and the mind is occupied in contemplation on the Lord, Jara (old age) does not touch the person.

The process of separating the two pieces –the killing of Jarasandha is achieved through Vedantic or Yogic Sadhana. In this episode the Yogic method is indicated.

The language of Yoga is different. One of the instructions is: 'There is a young maiden at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna: ravish her.' Ganga and Yamuna here mean the Ida and the Pingala Nadis; the young maiden is the Kundalini Shakti. She serves any bold person who takes hold of her hand and pulls her. Thus, if a person is directed to go to Varanasi and have Darshan of Umapati, to the ordinary person it is advice to undertake pilgrimage to Varanasi, but to the Yogi, it means: sit in Samadhi and have the Darshan of Shankara (Umapati) who is at the Sahasrara also called Varanasi in the Yogic language.

There are verses in the Maha Bharata that have two or more meanings. When the Pandavas go to Virata's court seeking shelter, King Virata asks their identity. Yudhisthira tells him:

युधिष्ठिरस्यासमहं पुरा सखा। वैयाघ्रपद्यः पुनरस्मि विप्रः अक्षान् प्रयोक्तु कुशलोऽस्मि देविनां कन्केति नाम्नास्मिविराट विश्रुतः ।।

M.Bh. 4-9-35

with This verse, read superficially, means: 'I was a bosom friend of Yudhisthira in days gone by; I am a Brahmin of Vyaghrapada Gotra: I am well versed in playing dice among gamblers; I am known by the name of Kanka.' If Yudhisthira's meaning was simply this, he would be a person uttering a lie. What he meant was: 'Friend, I was one Yudhisthira in days gone by. O Vipra (learned one) I am the son of Yama (Mrithyu, also known as Vyaghrapada He of the tiger's gait): I am well versed in utilising the senses

(Akshas) among sense-objects (Devinam). I am known as Kanka.' (Yama, the Lord of death, is also known by the name Kanka, as he carries away lives like a bird of prey.)

Interpreted in this way, Yudhisthira is not guilty of uttering any lie.

There are also verses composed like riddles:

एक्या द्वे विनिश्चित्य त्रीश्वतुर्भिर्वशे कुरु ।

पञ्च जित्वा विदित्वा षट् सप्त हित्वा सुखी मव।।

M.Bh. 5-33-51

With one, differentiate between the two, have three under your control, practise four, con- quer five, know the six, give up seven and be happy.)

This is an advice to a king regarding political science. With one (the intellect), differentiate between the two (Karya and Akarya- the proper and the improper), and get three (friends, enemies and neutrals) under your control; know the four (Saama, Daana, Bheda, and Danda the four U-payas); conquer the five (five senses); practise six (Sandhi, Vigraha, etc. the six ways that a should follow); give up seven (unreasonable hunting, infatuation for women, gambling, drink, inflicting very severe punishments and lancet tongue, and imposing very heavy fines.)

The author has said in the Adi Parva:

मन्वादि भारतं केचिदास्तिकादि तथाऽपरे ।

तथोपरिचराद्यन्ये विप्रा सम्यगधीयिरे ।।

(Some start reading from the story of Manu; some others begin from the story of Astika; some others read from the chapter of the Uparichara Akhyana.)

In this verse, the great author has given the clue to the basic scheme of the Maha Bharata.

Manu is the author of the Code of Ethics (Dharma Shastra). At the end of the epic summing up his sayings, Vyasa Bhagavan has given some verses known as 'Bharata Savitri'. The last verse is this:

न जातु कामान्न भयान्न लोभाद्धर्म त्यजेज्जीवितस्यापि हेतोः

नित्यो धर्मः सुखदुखे त्वनित्ये जीवो नित्यो हेतुरस्य ध्वनित्यः ।।

M. Bh. 18-5-76

(Neither for satisfying lust, nor out of fear or greed, should one give up Dharma, even for saving one's life. Dharma is eternal; pains and pleasures are transitory. The Jiva is immortal; the human body which is the vehicle of the Jiva is mortal.)

This emphasises the fact that one of the aims of the writer is to enunciate the glory of Dharma. Beginning from the chapter of the Manu's birth, the reader should look into the portions explaining Dharma.

One aim of all our scriptural works is to teach us the way to attain Immortality, i.e., to become free of the cycle of births and deaths. To do this, a knowledge of the process of birth and death, the entrance and exit of the human life, is essen- tial. The seventeenth and eighteenth Parvas of the Maha Bharata deal with the subject the last journey and the arrival of the Jiva (hero) at his destination.

Uparichara is the Vedic name for Vasu, the creative aspect of the Supreme Being, so there can be no doubt that the chapter with the story of King Uparichara deals with the process of crea- tion of man. Starting from the story of Uparishara one should read the portions referring to the origin of

man, his evolution and his struggle in fighting the enemies obstructing his path, and fitally his last journey towards perfection.

Let us consider the chapter describing the story of Astika. Astika is partly man and partly snake. We will not go far from the truth if we interpret this as the beginning of history of the human race. Astika may be the missing link at a stage in the evolution of man when he left the crawling reptile phase and stood up. The chapter of Astika describes the names of kings. Reading from this chapter, kings observe how great kings lived, and learn to mould their own lives on those lines.

Casting off the human body through the process of Yoga, at the journey's end (Yogena Ante tanutyjam) has been the practice of sages, savants and kings. The repeated utterance of Yogic terms by the author in the chapters of the Maha Prasthana Parva indicates that he is explaining the process of departure from this world through Yoga. To practise Yoga at this final stage is not practicable unless one had begun it earlier. The repeated references to Yoga and Yogis in the body of the work is proof that this book is also a treatise on Yoga. Every chapter of the Gita ends with the name of that chapter styled as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, etc. Sanatsujata, describing the glory of God-relisation in the Udyoga Parva says:

योगिनस्तं प्रपश्यन्ति भगवन्तं सनातनं

The Yogis perceive that great supreme ancient One.

This proves that the path of Yoga is described in the work.

Explaining the equality of Sankhya and Yoga, Sri Krishna says in the Gita:

यत्सांख्यैः प्राप्यते स्थानं तद्योगैरपि गम्यते Gita 5-5

That position which is attained through San- khya is also attainable through Yoga.

This argument has naturally to be explained in detail in the Maha Bharata, of which the Gita is the centre-piece: so both Sankhya and Yoga are described in detail.

While on a tour in the Far East Dr. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in one of his letters from Bali thus:

"The next day some Brahmin Pundits of the Raja's court came with a number of palm leaf manuscripts. One of the books was the Bhishma Parva of the Maha Bharata. The book was written in the local script. The top half contained Sanskrit verses and the lower half was a concise commentary in Balinese. The Raja started reading the Sanskrit verses... The whole of it was the teachings of the science of Yoga". *This proves that at some time in the past the Maha Bharata was used as a text book on Yoga and the Rachanavali, Vol. XIX page 487.

**Vide letter No. 10 Java Yatir Patra, Rabindra Rachanavali, Vol. XIX page: 487.*

Concluding the Gita discourse, Sri Krishna ad- vises mankind through Arjuna:

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।

मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ।।

Fix thy mind on me, be devoted to me, sacri- fice to me, bow down to me. Thou shalt come even to me, truly I promise unto thee, for thou art dear to me.

The next verse says:

Abandoning all duties, take refuge in me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins, grieve not.

The life and history of the Pandavas is a clear and concrete illustration of following the above instruction of the Lord.

Thus, the Maha Bharata is a multipurpose work and deals with innumerable subjects. The one requirement for the reader is to consider only the portions relevant at that time and ignore other views or aspects. For instance, Manu's Code says that when a husband is incapable of procreation, the wife can beget a child (one child) by someone else with the permission of her husband. Kunti, in this story, begets three children, one after another; this is not in accordance with the Code of Ethics. But this happening describes the process of human creation according to the Pancheekarana (quintuplication) theory. So, when we read this episode, we should forget Manu's Code. In other words, we should act as we do when we see a series of pictures on the cinema screen in which the same actors appear in different roles in different plays.

The identity of the actor is according to the charac- ter in the story, and has no connection with his private life or with other roles he has assumed in the different stories.

Thus, a knowledge of several science of the spiritual path, together with a background of lo- gic, Mimamsa, astrology, etc., is essential in order to interpret the Maha Bharata correctly.

Siva Samhita, a treatise on Yoga, says:

देहेऽस्मिन् वर्तते मेरुः सप्तद्वीपसमन्वितः ।

सरितः सागराः शैलाः क्षेत्राणि क्षेत्रपालकाः ।।१।।

ऋषयो मुनयः सर्वे नक्षत्राणि ग्रहास्तथा ।

पुण्यतीर्थानि पीठानि वर्तन्ते पीठदेवताः ।।२।।

सृष्टिसंहारकर्तारौ भ्रमन्तौ शशिभास्करौ ।

नभो वायुश्च वह्निश्च जलं पृथ्वी तथैव च ।।३।।

त्रैलोक्ये यानि भूतानि तानि सर्वाणि देहतः ।

मेरु’ संवेष्ट्य सर्वत्र व्यवहारः प्रवर्तते

जानाति यः सर्वमिदं स योगी नात्र संशयः ।।

(शिवसंहिता-द्वितीयपटलः)

In this human body exists the Meru, including the seven islands, rivers, lakes, oceans, mountains, sacred places, with the rulers of those places, the Rishis and Munis, the planets and the stars, holy Teerthas with the presiding Deities, the creative and the destructive forces, the sun and the moon, the sky, the Vayu, the fire, the water and the earth-whatever exists in the three worlds of crea tion exists in this body. He who knows all this is the Yogi, without any doubt."

Thus, to tread in the path of Yoga, a thorough knowledge of the human body in its subtle aspects is essential. This is explained in the Jambookhanda Vinirmana Parva section of the Bhishma Parva. The human body is compared to the map of India. India was known as Jambudwipa in the epic age. This human body is called Jambudwipa in the Yogic language. Success in Yoga or any other spiritual path requires the annihilation or control of the six enemies (lust, anger, greed, pride, jealousy, hypocrisy,) and their retinue. A knowledge of the human body from a Yogic point of view is absolutely essential, so the Jambudwipa Vinirmana Parva is included at the beginning of the Bhishma Parva, as that is the beginning of the war. In the narrative it denotes a description of the area of the land in which the battle is imminent; in the spiritual battlefield this refers to the human body, mastery of which is essential to march in the path of Self-realisation. Thus, the episodes

described in the Maha Bharata have deeper meanings, too. according to how they are read.

Passing from mouth to mouth, and then in the course of several editions, the book has undergone various changes. No doubt a number of interpolations are there, but, removing any verse or portion from the text is injurious. When I was a boy, I badgered my elders to take me to a circus that was on a visit to our town. As my elders could not go to the circus that day, they sent me with another person. That gentleman got me the ticket and sent me into the tent and then left. I went in and stood by the side of the tent wall. Some boys got in without ticket from under the flap. One of the circus people came up and drove me out also along with the boys that had trespassed! In the same way, a genuine verse may get removed if scholars start removing dubious verses or portions.

THE STORY

The Adi Parva or the First Book consists of nineteen sections. The first five sections describe the process of genesis, as is common to all epics and scriptures. The seventh section, known as Sambhava Parva, describes the birth of the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

Vichitra Veerya, the son of Santanu and Satyavati, dies young, leaving his two wives childless. To continue the lineage, they beget a son each from Vyasa, with the permission of Satyavati, their mother-in-law. Pandu is one, and Dhritarashtra is the other. Later in life, Pandu marries two wives, Kunti and Madri. Dhritarashtra marries Gandhari. Pandu is cursed for a sin while hunting, hence is not permitted to unite with his wives. Kunti begets three children by Yama, Indra and Vayu consecutively, and Madri has twins through the celestial physicians, Aswini Devatas. Dhritarashtra has one hundred and one children by his wife Gandhari. Pandu passes away, and his sons, the Pandavas, are under the protection of Dhritarashtra, whose own sons are known as the Kauravas. The Pandavas and the Kauravas grow up together under the tutelage of the grand old man, Bhishma. The Pandavas are brave and intelligent; the Kauravs are unable to tolerate them. They plot

to destroy Bhima, the strong man among the five brothers, but fail repeatedly. Then the Pandavas decide to live separately at Varanavata or Hastinapura. Aiming to destroy the Pandavas, the Kauravas construct a house of lac (wax) and fill it with many combustible substances and plan to set fire to the house on a particular night. Vidura, a step-brother of Pandu, acquaints them with the impending danger and advises them to escape. Bhima opens an underground tunnel and carries away all the brothers and the mother Kunti. Now they go and live in Eka- Chakra Nagara in the guise of Brahmins, undergo various experiences and drift to the country of Drupada for his daughter's wedding. The wedding is in the Kshatriya style, a Swayamvara. The Pandavas stay in a potter's workshop, and attend the Swayamvara in the guise of Brahmins. Draupadi the princess, can wed only that person who would pierce the eye of a fish hanging above. The arrow has to be shot through a ring, while the person is looking down at the fish's image in a cauldron of oil placed directly below.

All the Kshatriyas try, but fail to hit the fish. Then, Prince Dhrishtadyumna, the brother of Draupali, announces that anyone of the Brahmins in the assembly may try his skill in archery and see if he can win the Princess. Arjuna is successful in piercing the target. The Princess comes with the Pandavas to their abode. They inform their mother that they have that day brought 'valuable alms'.

The mother tells them from inside the cottage to share the Bhiksha equally. Later she comes outside and sees that the Bhiksha is a Princess and not food, but as she had already given utterance, what she had demanded had to come to pass. So, Princess Draupadi becomes the wife of the five brothers.

The Pandavas go to Indraprastha and meet the elders. Bhishma advises the Kauravas to give the Pandavas a half share of the kingdom. The Pandavas receive their share and go to Khandavaprastha to live. Sage Narada arrives and advises the mode of life to be conducted by the brothers in order to avoid causing ill-feeling while sharing a single wife, and they follow his instructions.

Arjuna goes on a pilgrimage for one year, travels over many lands, arrives at Dwaraka and marries Subhadra (Sri Krishna's sister).

One day, while Arjuna and Sri Krishna are spending some time on the bank of Yamuna, Agni, the Fire God, comes in the guise of a Brahmin and asks alms of them. They promise to fulfil his desire. Then, Agni discloses his real identity and tells them that he is suffering from indigestion, as a certain king performed a great sacrifice and fed him with a very large quantity of ghee as Ahuti. If they help him to burn the Khandava Vana of Indra, Agni would be free from his sickness. Arjuna offers his support; Agni starts burning the Khandava Vana. Indra pours rain and hailstones, but Arjuna protects Agni.

In gratitude, Agni fetches for Arjuna a wonderful bow, Gandiva, from Varuna. Maya, a resident of Khandava Vana, is allowed to escape from death by Arjuna. In gratitude, Maya constructs for the Pandavas an excellent palace of precious stones and valuables, and the Pandavas live there.

Now let us look into the allegorical or spiritual meaning of this section.

In a chapter in the Aswamedha Parva, this human body is divided into two parts, called the Antaratma, and the Bahiratma. The five Vayus, Prana, Apana, Udana, Samana, Vyana, with the Buddhi and the Individual Soul, altogether totalling Seven, are known as Antaratma.

The Ten Senses, with the Mind (the Eleventh) constitute the Outer Body or Bahiratma.

These two always fight with each other for supremacy over the body. The enlarged edition of this war between the Eighteen is the Battle of Kurukshetra. The Five Brothers have later given their names in Virata Parva (Book IV) which tally with the names of the Five Vayus in the body. The Yogi conquers his body through Pranayama and overcomes the enemies in the path of spiritual progress. Kunti is the Kriya Shakti in the body that directs the duties of the different Vayus.

The tenant in this town of Nine Gates (the human body) decides to have total control over the body. He cannot get on with the inner enemies.

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*Prana, Apana, Udana, Samana and Vyana.

He decides to live separately. He goes to Varanavata.

Varana or the Elephant (Tusker) is the symbol of the Turiya (the fourth stage). The Tusker, when separated from the herd, shuns company and spends its time in seclusion. It is said that the tusker does not lie down and sleep at this stage, but spends its time in the standing position, never sleeping soundly. So this is used as a symbol to explain the state of Turiya Avastha or Samadhi. The human body is the 'lac palace,' abode constructed of wax and filled with nerves and veins the hemp cords described in the story. The force of latent impressions causes the person to sit in Samadhi, but he has not annihilated the enemies, lust, anger, etc. They burn the Nadis. Before this fire spreads,, Bhima (the Apana Vayu) carries away the other brothers and Kunti and leaves the palace through the underground tunnel. Death occurs through the Tenant leaving the house by the backdoor.

The Yoga Bhrashta gets a new birth soon. This is explained in the succeeding sections. The Eka Chakra Nagara is the human body where the embryo, consisting of the five Vayus and the Kriya Shakti has found abode. The Swayamvara is the process of creation of this body. The male body is the potter's workshop and the display of archery is the process of copulation. Just as the potter puts a little earth over the wheel and turns it with his rod and creates pots, so the male places a little earth on the wheel (Sree Chakra) and gives it a turn. The wheel rotates and in the course of time this earthen pot (the human body) is created. Arjuna shoots the arrow through a ring looking at the reflection of the fish's eye in a cauldron of oil; the conception of the human embryo and its passage through the fallopian tube is a process of blind shooting. The Princess is Buddhi (intellect), the owner of the new abode whom the Princes marry and start living with, in the house. (Vide Bhagavatha, Puranjana Akhyana).

Now let us consider the Khandava Vana Dahana episode.

In the Maha Prasthana Parva, when the five brothers and Draupadi are on the march, bound heavenwards, a colossal figure stands in their path and tells them:

ततो देवः स सप्तार्चिः पाण्डवानिदमब्रवीत् ।

O sons of Pandu, O heroes, I am Agni the Saptarchis, the seven-tongued. I helped Arjuna and brought him the Gandiva bow from Varuna. Let him discard it.)

Saptarchis, the seven-tongued one, is another name for Vaishwanara, the gastric fire in the human body. The seven tongues are the five senses, the mind, and the Buddhi (intellect). Khandava means sweet. Khandavaprastha means the abode of pleasures. When the tenant of the body heedlessly enjoys pleasures, they are like too much ghee poured into sacrificial fire enfeebling the gastric fire. This is the condition of gastric dyspepsia resulting from a person indulging in sensual excesses. Then the only remedy is to destroy the 'wilderness of pleasures' (the Khandava Vana). In the narrative, the process of destruction of the forest is described thus:

एवमुकः स भगवान्दाशार्ईणाजु'नेन च

तैजसं रूपमास्थाय दावं दग्धु प्रचक्रमे । आदि. २५१-३५ ।।

(Thus assured of protection by Arjuna and Krishna, he, Agni, started burning the forest, as- suming the Taijasa form.)

Taijasa is the state of the Vaishwanara when the body is in the dream state (Vishwa, Taijasa, Prajna and Turiya). So this episode describes the Vedantic method of experiencing all worldly pleasures and pains as in a dream, when the Jiva becomes free from attachment. Once the Spiritual Warrior is free from attachment to sensual pleasures, he can control untold spiritual and

material wealth and can live in great comfort. This is the episode of Maya constructing the palace for the Pandavas.

सर्वतः परिवार्याथ सप्तार्चिज्वलनस्तथा ।

ददाह खाण्डवं दावं युगान्तमिव दर्शयन् ।।

Enveloping all round the seven-tongued one then started burning the Khandava Vana, like the great fire at dissolution of creation.

घ्राणं जिह्वा च चतुश्च त्यक् च श्रोत्रं च पञ्चमम् ।

मनो बुद्धिश्च सप्तैता जिह्वा वैश्वानराचिषः

The nose, the tongue, eyes, the skin, the ears, the mind and the intellect, these seven are the seven tongues of Vaishwanara.

मेयं दृश्यं च पेयं च त्पृश्यं श्राव्यं तथैव च ।

मन्तव्यमवबोद्धव्यं ताः सप्त समिधो मताः ।।

Smelling, drinking, perceiving, touching, hear- ing, thinking and knowing are the seven Samits (of- ferings) to the Vaishwanara through these seven tongues.

घ्ये पेये च दृश्ये च स्पृश्ये श्राव्ये तथैव च ।

मन्तव्येप्यथ बोद्धव्ये सुभगे पश्य सर्वदा ।।

हवींध्यग्निषु होतारः सप्तथा सप्तसप्तसु

The smeller, drinker, perceiver, feeler, hearer, the reflector and the knower are the seven Ritwiks. This process of sacrifice by seven Hotrus goes on at all times in this body.

CHAPTER TWO

Book II

SABHA PARVA

The second book called Sabha Parva, has nine sections: the Mantra Parva (the Council), the Jarasandha Vadha Parva, the Digvijaya Parva (the allround conquest), the Rajasooya Parva, the Arghyaharana Parva, Sisupala Vadha Parva, Dyoota Parva (gambling episode), and the Anudyoota Parva (the supplementary gambling).

Maya, in gratitude for saving his life, begs Arjuna to permit him to do some service. Arjuna directs Maya to follow the instructions of Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna commands Maya to construct a grand council chamber: so Maya procures rare and valuable articles and duly constructs the council chamber. Sri Krishna takes leave of the Pandavas and goes to Dwaraka.

Yudhisthira is proud to possess such a grand council hall. Sage Narada comes to Yudhisthira's court. He describes the council halls of Indra, Varuna, Yama and Kubera, etc. Narrating the beauty of Indra's court, Narada describes the courtiers there and tells the story of Harischandra, explaining the glory of the Rajasooya sacrifice.
Yudhisthira decides to perform the Rajasooya sacrifice, and asks Sri Krishna for permission. Sri Krishna has arrived at Khandavapastha and joins the council. Sri Krishna, Yudhishthira and Bhima discuss the question of performing the Rajasooya. Sri Krishna explains the one hindrance in performing the sacrifice. Jarasandha, the king of Magadha, is very powerful; until he is conquered, the sacrifice is not possible. Sri Krishna also explains

the cause of Jarasandha's hatred towards him. Sri Krishna leaves for Jarasandha's capital accompanied by Bhima and Arjuna. They go disguised as Brahmins and challenge Jara-sandha to single combat. Jarasandha selects Bhima as his equal. They fight, and Bhima tears Jarasan-dha in two. The pieces unite again. Then Sri Krishna directs Bhima to throw the pieces topsy-turvy. Bhima does so. Jarasandha is destroyed, the princes imprisoned by him are released, and Sri Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna return to Khandavaprastha with valuable booty.

Yudhisthira remembers the instructions of sage Narada and commissions his brothers to go and conquer the kings who do not accept his sovereignty. The brothers go in different directions, conquer the kings that oppose them, and command them to come to Khandavaprastha and serve in the Rajasooya sacrifice.

Sri Krishna arrives at Khandavaprastha from Dwaraka and arranges for the performance of the sacrifice. Vyasa has invited the learned ones. The different offices are allotted to the priests. Dhritarashtra, Bhishma and all those invited arrive.

The sacrifice commences. As directed by Bhishma, Sahadeva offers the First Honour to Sri Krishna.
Sisupala, the King of Chedi, is angry and finds fault. An argument ensues. Sri Krishna narrates Sisupala's origin and his evil doings. During the discussion, Yudhisthira requests Bhishma to narrate the glorious deeds of Sri Krishna. Bhishma describes the different incarnations of Sri Krishna, their purpose, and the glorious deeds of each incarnation.

Some other kings in the assembly support Sisupala. Sisupala abuses Sri Krishna. Bhima gets wild with anger, but Bhishma pacifies him. Bhishma narrates Sisupala's follies and his inevitable end at the hands of Sri Krishna. Sisupala again abuses Sri Krishna. Hearing Bhishma's narration, other kings run away. Sisupala prepares to fight Sri Krishna single-handed. They fight and in the end Sri Krishna kills Sisupala with His Discus.

Now the Rajasooya is performed in grand style, All the learned participants are honoured and they take their leave.

Yudhisthira observes some evil omens and en-quires their meaning from Vyasa. Vyasa explains and departs to Swarga.

Duryodhana is fooled in Yudhisthira's court.
He is unable to distinguish between ponds and artificial set-ups, real doors and crystal partitions, and he slips down several times. Bhima ridicules Duryodhana, who returns home in a highly depressed state. Sakuni (a near relative of Duryodhana) asks Duryodhana the cause of his melancholy. Duryodhana describes the dishonour he experienced at Yudhisthira's court and they discuss the mode of avenging the insult. They know that it is impossible to conquer the Pandavas by might. Hence, they plot to challenge the Pandavas to play dice and defeat them by cheating. They prevail upon the blind king to permit gambling and to invite Yudhisthira. Duryodhana describes the Rajasooya Yajna and expresses displeasure at the success of the Pandavas. Dhritarashtra advises Duryodhana not to be jealous and harbour hatred of the Pandavas, but Duryodhana does not agree. Dhritarashtra sends Vidura to fetch, the Pandavas, and in due course they arrive at Indraprastha. They assemble at the Gambling Hall where Sakuni challenges Yudhisthira to Aksha-Krida (play of dice). The bets are decided. Yudhisthira loses every bet and forfeits all his property and himself. Then, one by one, he first loses his brothers, then his wife Draupadi. Dussasana goes into the inner chambers and drags Draupadi into the gambling hall and insults her, saying that she is now the slave of the Kauravas, as her husband has lost her in gambling. Draupadi questions the method of gambling - Yudhisthira had staked his brothers and wife as bets after he had laid himself and lost. Draupadi argues that this is not in order. Dussasana tries to remove the upper cloth of Draupadi, saying that as a slave she has no right to wear an upper cloth before her masters. Draupadi prays to Sri Krishna to protect her modesty. By Sri Krishna's grace, Draupadi's clothes multiply, and Dussasana is unable to expose her.

Duryodhana insults Draupadi and asks her to sit on his lap. Bhima takes a vow that he will break Duryodhana's thigh in single combat. Karna insuits the Pandavas and Arjuna vows that he will kill Karna in battle. Vidura counsels Dhritarashtra to advise his sons to behave properly. Dhritarashtra pacifies the Pandavas and requests Draupadi to ask boons. Draupadi begs that Yudhisthira and others be made free and allowed to return. Dhritarashtra grants the boon and the Pandavas leave for their home. After their departure, Duryodhana prevails upon the blind king to invite the Pandavas again, and says that it is impossible to conquer them by valour. Dhritarashtra sends messengers to call back the Pandavas. The messengers convey the king's command and the Pandavas return to Indraprastha. They are challenged again to Akshakrida, and Yudhisthira loses all his property. They are challenged again with the condition that if they lose, they must go to the wilderness for twelve years and live one year incognito amongst friends,-if discovered during this period, they should go into the wilderness again for another twelve years.. Again Yudhisthira loses. The Pan• davas depart to the forest.

Dhritarashtra discusses with Vidura and then with Sanjaya the consequences of these happenings, and is highly depressed about it.

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The Rajasooya is a sacrifice performed by a powerful king to ensure that all the minor kings in his realm accept his sovereignty. Yudhisthirs performs this sacrifice with Sri Krishna's help, and the two chief enemies Jarasandha and Sisupala are destroyed. The Jiva is king in the body. He should be the all-powerful king and all other forces in the body must obey his commands. The great enemies are 'Jarasandha' and 'Sisupala'.

The Jarasandha in the narrative is the son of King Brihadratha. As already explained, the king's two queens give birth to two halves of a child. Finding the pieces lifeless they throw them on to a dung-heap. An ogress named Jara comes and picks up the pieces to eat. When she joins the pieces, the child becomes alive. The king accepts the child and names him Jarasandha,

as he was joined by Jara. When the child comes of age he assumes his father's place. The father crowns the son and goes to the forest to lead a Vanaprastha life. Jarasandha becomes very powerful and conquers many kings.

The king is the Supreme Being. His two queens are two aspects of Prakriti. The two pieces of the child are the Jiva and the Deha. The ogress Jara is old age. She joins the two pieces and the child becomes alive. Brihadratha is also a name of Indra. As long as these two pieces are united this Jarasandha acts as directed by Indra, who rules the senses. These pieces should be separated. This can be done through Asana-jaya and Bandhas - control of the Vyana and Apana Vayus-of course with the co-operation of Sri Krishna. When the pieces are torn in two and thrown topsyturvy, the Jiva directed towards the Lord and the Deha towards earthly duties, the demon Jarasandha is destroyed. Yudhisthira (the tenant) can command obedience from all minor chieftains in this body.

Sisupala is the motive force that causes creation of countless desires, children of the mind's creation.. This is a hindrance for spiritual progress. As long as the Jive is a slave of this motive force that causes desire after desire to come up, the Jiva will not be able to get the direction of the Indweller.

When these two hurdles are overcome, the performance of the Rajasooya sacrifice, i.e., establishing the supreme rule of the Jiva and control over all the forces in the body becomes practicable.

But such a state does not suit the enemy forces that are residing in the body. They challenge the king to Akshakrida. As well as meaning dice play, Akshakrida indicates indulging in sensual pleasures. At the command of the chief of the sense forces they become unruly and the Jiva loses everything and is completely astray, not knowing what to do. Just as a king cannot refuse when another one challenges him to dice play, the Jiva cannot refuse when the senses become unruly and challenge him to Krida or sensual sport. In this sport the Jiva is cheated of all his spiritual wealth and intellect and is like one in a wilderness.

CHAPTER THREE

Book III

VANA PARVA

The third book known as the Vana Parva has twenty-two sections.
The five brothers depart from Varanavata through the gate of Prosperity–

(वर्धमानपुरद्वारादभिनिष्क्रम्य ते तदा)

The Brahmins who were dependent on them all for so long will not forsake them. Yudhistira tells them of his penniless condition and inability to support them, but they are not willing to give up his company.

Sage Dhoumya advises Yudhisthira to worship the sun. Yudhisthira does so and gets an Akshaya Patra (a Vessel of Plenty) from the sun. The vessel will provide all varieties of food. Yudhisthira may feed all guests and Abhyagatas and dependents, and then take his own food. After him, Draupadi, the queen, may have her meal; but when she has finished, the vessel will be empty for the day. Now the party continue their travels.

Demon Kimmira, a resident of Kamyaka Vana and a brother of Bakasura (killed by Bhima in Eka Chakra Nagara) tries to prevent their passage. Bhima kills the demon in a fight.

Arjuna decides to perform austerities and get divine armaments. Siva comes with His Consort in the guise of a hunter (Kirata), tests Arjuna's valour and gives the Pashupata and other Astras. Arjuna then proceeds to Indra-Loka where Indra receives him with great affection. While in Indras court, Arjuna

keenly watches the dancing of Urvasi, the celestial courtesan. At Indra's command Urvasi visits Arjuna's chamber that night. Arjuna is shocked and tells her that he had no libidinous motive in watching her performance at the court. Urvasi curses Arjuna to become an eunuch. Indra hears this and says that the curse will operate for one year only, and will be helpful later on.

Brihad-Aswa comes to the Pandavas. He sympathises with their condition and narrates the story of Nala, King of Vidarbha who also lost his all in Akshakrida and went to the wilderness, together with his wife Damayanti. The couple became separated. Nala went to King Rituparna and served him as a charioteer. Damayanti, after some difficulty, reached her father's home. She traced Nala and got him to come to her father's place through a ruse. King Rituparna became aware of Nala's identity, taught him Aksha Hridaya and in return learnt Aswa Vidya from him. Nala went back to his kingdom, challenged his brother who had formerly defeated him in Aksha Krida, and this time succeeded in winning. Now Nala ruled his land happily thenceforth.

Brihad-Aswa narrates the stories of several other kings of yore who saw lean days in their life. He teaches Aksha Hridaya to Yudhisthira and departs,

The Pandavas come to Kamyaka Vana. Sage Narada comes also and Yudhisthira enquires of him the method of performing the Bhoo Pradakshina– the pilgrimage of going round the earth. Narada instructs him and priest Dhaumya describes the sacred Teerthas on the four quarters of the globe.

Sage Lomasa arrives at the Pandavas' camp, and after narrating Arjuna's deeds informs Yudhisthira the procedure to be followed while on pilgrimage. The Pandavas set forth. Sage Lomasa tells of the lives and deeds of the great sages Agastya and Parasurama, and of the battle between Indra and Vritrasura. The party visit many sacred places, and Lomasa narrates a number of epic stories on the way.

Once, while Bhima is away on an errand to fetch the rare Saugandhika flowers, demon Jatasura, who has been staying with the Pandavas all along,

carries away the four brothers and Draupadi. While returning, Bhima meets him on the way, kills him and rescues the prisoners.

The party proceed on their pilgrimage and visit various other places.

Bhima has a fight with some Yaksha followers of Kubera. Kubera hears of this incident and goes to Bhima, full of anger. In the meantime, Yudhisthira comes there, searching for Bhima. Kubera, on seeing Yudhisthira, becomes calm, and gives valuable advice. Priest Dhaumya describes the location and particulars of the mountains Meru and Mandara, and the movements of the sun and the moon.

Arjuna returns to his brothers with valuable gifts of rare Astras from Indra. In return for giving the Astras, Indra has asked Arjuna to slay the demons Nivata Kavachas who have been harrassing him. Arjuna challenges the demons, fights and destroys them, and on his way to Indra's realm destroys the demons residing at Hiranyapura. Arjuna shows Yudhisthira the Divine Astras he has secured from Indra. At the instructions of Indra, sage Narada comes and advises Arjuna not to exhibit the Astras to anyone.

The Pandavas depart from Gandhamadana. mountain. Sage Lomasa takes leave of them. The Pandavas proceed further and arrive at Dwaita Vana after visiting some sacred places.

One day while Bhima is hunting, a huge snake catches him and folds its coils around him. Bhima is unable to free himself. Yudhisthira comes there searching for Bhima. The snake puts several questions to Yudhisthira. When he answers them, the snake is pleased and releases Bhima. The snake is Nahusha, a king of yore, who had been cursed by Agastya to become a snake. The period of the curse ends and Nahusha goes to celestial regions.

The Pandavas leave Dwaita Vana and come to Kamyaka Vana. Sage Markandeya arrives, too and describes to Yudhisthira how all Jivas have to reap the fruits of their good or evil deeds. He then narrates the glory of the Brahmanas, and tells how life existed in the different Yugas, and also

describes some of the incarnations of Vishnu. In this description sage Markandeya explains the magnitude of the Cosmic Creation, and the benefits of Dana. He tells how King Bali was tested by Indra and Agni in the guise of a kite and a dove, and how Bali offered an equal weight of flesh from his body to save the dove. The sage tells several stories and teaches the secrets of ethics, then describes how Agni was created, and the details of Agni Vamsa. He also tells of Skanda's life and deeds how Skanda was born, how He came to command the celestial army, and so on.

This section is named Markandeya Samsya Parva, i.e., the episode describing the process of occupying the same seat as Markandeya.

Then comes the Draupadi Satyabhama Samvada Parva. One day Satyabhama expresses surprise at Draupadi's five husbands and asks her how she is able to keep them contented. Draupadi explains the duties of a devoted wife.

The news that the Pandavas are happy even in the wilderness disturbs the Kauravas. Duryodhana comes to the forest with a big retinue. The Kauravas come into conflict with some Gandharvas on the question of bathing in a lake. A fight ensues, in which the Gandharvas defeat the Kauravas and take Duryodhana a prisoner. Hearing this

news Yudhisthira sends Arjuna to save Duryodhana. Arjuna fights the Gandharvas and releases Duryodhana.

In a dream, the beasts of the forest request Yudhisthira to allow them to live, as they are being destroyed by his brothers. Yudhisthira promises them immunity and requests his brothers not to kill them.

Vyasa Bhagavan comes to the Pandavas one day and describes the glory of charity. He tells the story of Mudgala, a recluse who lived by collecting fallen grains from fields, and once gave a measure of grain to sage Durvasa. Celestial messengers arrived and requested Mudgala to come to heaven, but Mudgala asked them to describe the life there first. When they did so,

Mudgala declined to go there, on the ground that the pleasures of heaven were not eternal.

One day sage Durvasa goes to Duryodhana with a thousand disciples. Duryodhana serves the sage and pleases him. The sage permits Duryodhana to ask a boon. Duryodhana requests the sage to go to the Pandavas after all of them, including Draupadi, have taken their meal, and beg for food. Duryodhana thinks that they will not be able to feed the sage and his disciples, and as a result the sage would become angry and curse them.

Durvasa goes to the Pandavas. Yudhisthira requests him to take his bath and come for food. Meantime, Draupadi prays to Sri Krishna to help her. Sri Krishna comes there and asks Draupadi to give Him food. The Akshaya Patra is brought to Sri Krishna: He finds a bit of green leaf at the bottom. He asks Draupadi to give this to Him. When she does so, Sri Krishna eats it and gives out a belch of satisfaction. Instantly, the sage and his followers, who were bathing in the river, feel full in their stomachs, and find themselves unable to eat anything. In the meantime, Bhima comes in search of them, as they are late. Fearing that Bhima would attack them if they do not follow him, they run away. Bhima returns and informs Yudhisthira of the incident, and Yudhisthira hears from Sri Krishna what Draupadi had done.

One day when the five brothers had gone out hunting, Jayadratha, the King of Sindhu, comes to Draupadi, enquires her parentage and other particulars, and requests her to become his wife. She refuses, and Jayadratha carries her away.

When the Pandavas return from hunting they hear the news of Draupadi being carried away. They follow the chariot tracks of Jayadratha, attack him and kill his servants. He leaves Draupadi and runs away, but Bhima and Arjuna pursue him and bring him back a prisoner. Yudhisthira tells Bhima to release Jayadratha after he declares himself as Pandava-dasa (slave of the Pandavas).

Yudhisthira asks sage Markandeya if there was ever a more unfortunate person than himself. Markandeya narrates the life of Rama, and describes how he overcame all troubles and trials.

He also narrates the story of Savitri, and describe 3 the glory of chastity of women (Pativrata Mahatmyam).

Janamejaya requests Vaisampayana to describe how Indra went disguised as a Brahmin to Karna, and begs the gift of the Kavacha and Kundala from him. No one could conquer Karna as long as he was wearing these, and Indra, wishing to aid the Pandavas, gets them from Karna.

Surya had advised Karna in a dream that Indra wou'd come to him to beg his Kundala and Kavacha, and that Karna should not give them. Karna replied that he cannot refuse when someone begs anything from him. Surya again prevailed upon Karna not to give the Kavacha and Kundala and explained to him the futility of name and fame. Karna humbly requested Surya to permit him to give the articles to Indra if he asked for them, and Surya advised him to give them only after getting Power from Indra in return..... The story of Karna's birth is told by Vaisampayana.

The Pandavas come to Dwaita Vana again. A Brahmin living in the neighbourhood had kept the Arani and Mantham (the wooden sticks which are rubbed together to produce the sacrificial fire) on a bush. A stag, rubbing itself on the bush, carries away the sticks in its horns. The Brahmin runs after it, but is unable to catch it, so he begs Yudhisthira to help him, as he has to perform the daily ritual. Yudhisthira sends Arjuna to rescue the sticks. Arjuna chases the stag for a long distance, and eventually arrives, thirsty, by the shores of a lake. He goes to quench his thirst, but a Voice forbids him to drink the water without first answering certain questions. Arjuna does not heed the warning, drinks the water and falls down lifeless.

When Arjuna does not return, even after a long time, Bhima sets out in search of him. Bhima also does not return. The Twin Brothers are also sent, one after another, and they, too, fail to return. Then Yudhisthira himself goes

in search of his brothers. He arrives on the shores of the lake, and the same Voice forbids him when he tries to drink water. He agrees to answer the questions, and does so satisfactorily. Then the Voice says: 'I am Yaksha, the guardian of this lake. I forbade your brothers to drink the waters before answering my questions. They did not heed my voice; they drank, and are dead. I am pleased with you, and will bring any one of your brothers back to life.'

Yudhisthira says: 'Kunti, my mother, has me for a son. Let one of Madri's (step-mother's) sons come to life, then both mothers will be on a level.'

The Voice is highly pleased with this answer, and then a figure shows itself and says: 'I am Dharma, your father. I staged all this to test you, and I am highly pleased at your behaviour. All your brothers will come to life. The Arani is here.

Take it to the Brahmin. Ask what boon you wish.' Yudhisthira says: 'I am fortunate in having seen you in person. I will accept any boon that you may bestow. Please bless me that I may conquer lust, greed and anger throughout my life. Let my mind be established ever in charity, austerity and truth.'

Dharma says: 'These good qualities are born with you. What you have wished will happen.'

The brothers return to their hermitage with the Arani. • • •

The Vana Parva, the Third Book, narrates the life of the brothers during their twelve years' life of exile in the wilderness. Many sages and savants visit them while they are in exile and counsel them about the Path towards Perfection. At the end of the Book, in the concluding portion of Yudhisthira's conversation, he begs Dharma to bless him so that he may control lust, greed and anger throughout his life, and that his mind may ever be established in charity, austerity and truth. The life led by the brothers in exile is devoted to

gaining these qualities, and the advice tendered by the sages and savants are the different paths to attain perfection.

Before examining the teachings of the sages, I wish to draw the reader's attention to an important point. Throughout the third book, the brothers are said to have lived either in Kamyaka Vana or Dwaita Vana. When in Kamyaka Vana, they perform austerities to gain some power (Shakti) or boon. While at Dwaita Vana, they are tested by one person or another. Most of the advice tendered is while they are at Kamyaka Vana. These two names are surely a description of the condition of one who is a seeker and has been restlessly wandering as in a wilderness. Kamyaka Vana is the Forest of Desires. The one desire that a seeker is permitted is the desire for Perfection. But, he is tried again and again in his journey. He is thrust into difficult situations. This is clearly illustrated at the commencement of the Third Book.

Yudhisthira is of a charitable disposition. He has sheltered many Brahmins and students. When he lost his all and had to go into exile, they follow him. He explains his position, but still they are not willing to part from him. Helpless, he seeks advice from the priest Dhaumya. The priest advises him to worship the sun, and when he does so, he gets the Akshaya Patra (the Vessel of Plenty). This episode informs the reader of the necessity of worshipping the sun when one is in want, and also describes the situation of a charitably minded seeker in the midst of his trials. Lastly, it proves that those who have faith and devotion in the Lord, like Yudhisthira, will get proper advice and success in overcoming all difficulties.

Dwaita Vana is the wilderness of duality. Until a seeker realises the Supreme One, a sense of Duality is essential; the differentiation of the seeker and the Sought is necessary. But the seeker should be aware of his oneness with all creation, at the very least with other human beings. He should treat his neighbour as himself. This is illustrated in the Yaksha Prasna episode when Yudhisthira is tested. He feels that the loss of a son is the same to either mother or step-mother, and requests that one of Madri's sons may come to life. This illustrates the state where the seeker, after long wandering, realises the oneness of all beings,

I have already explained that Aksha Krida means the art of sensual pleasures, as well as dice play. A king who has lost his all in gambling, playing while ignorant of the art, should go and learn from a master.

Kama (the science of love) is one of the Four Purusharthas (objects of human pursuit). A clear knowledge of this science is essential. When one loses his all through over-indulgence and is 'in a wilderness' he should learn the science from a master. Brihad-Aswa is a Gandharva. He teaches Yudhisthira the Aksha-Krida. From one point of view, this means 'the art of gambling with dice'. from another, it means the 'art of using the senses among the sense-objects'. Yudhisthira learnt this art from Brihad-Aswa and tells King Virata when he goes to his court:

अक्षान्प्रयोक्तुं कुशलोऽस्मि देविनाम्

This utterance has a double meaning. One is: I am an expert in the art of dice playing amongst gamblers.': the other is: 'I am well versed in the art of using the senses amongst the objects.'

One of the narratives told by sage Markandeya is the episode of the Battle of Indra with the demon Vritra, which appears in several epics. According to the Aitareya and Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishads, Indra resides in the body in three places - the throat, heart and eyes. He rules all physical actions. Vritra is lust. The battle between Indra and Vritra is the battle with lust (Kama). This fight is described in several ways. In one of them, Indra chases the demon, and the demon, finding no place to hide, enters Indra's body through his mouth, and hides there while Indra searches all around. This explains the futility of actively battling with lust. The path advocated is sublimation, which is explained later on.

The Teertha Yatra Parva episode narrates the pilgrimage to sacred places. Many of the places mentioned are styled imaginary by lexicographers. In fact, while explaining the glory of sacred places, the narrative refers to the

different parts of the human body itself. A knowledge of the subtle body is essential in order to gain control over the body. A knowledge of Vedic terms will help the reader to locate these Teerthas in the body, as almost all names are Vedic names. This chapter is again explained in the Jamboo Khanda Vinirmana Parva of the Sixth Book (Bhishma Parva).

Sage Lomasa and sage Markandeya are persons who, through their austerities and glorious deeds, have achieved immortality. Markandeya battles with Yama, the Lord of Death, and gains victory.

The episode of Agni described by Markandeya refers to the Science of Conquest of Death taught by Yama to Markandeya and Nachiketa.

This section is known as Markandeya Samsya Parva 'occupying the same seat with Markandeya'. Markandeya had conquered death. The seeker who desires to realise the Supreme One should have no fear of death. Yudhisthira hears from Markandeya the glorious episodes of the past and loses all fear of death, and sits on an equal level with the great sage.

The episode of the abduction of Draupadi by Jayadratha is an instance of what may happen in the case of a person who is financially unstable. Villains may attack and abduct the wife. Through the narration of the glorious story of Rama, the duty of the male to rescue the woman is illustrated.

The episode describing the begging of Karna's Kavacha and Kundala teaches the seeker the necessity for conquest over greed through charity, and cautions him of the problems that will confront a charitably minded one if he takes a vow. Karna had taken a vow never to say NO to anyone that begged of him. Such a vow brings a person to a serious and awkward position. Charity is noble. but becomes a hindrance at a certain stage. This is clearly explained in the Karna Parva. Such a vow is only a result of attachment to name and fame. Surya, advising Karna not to give the Kundala and Kavacha, describes the futility of name and fame. He says: 'Fame is only enjoyed while one is alive. To the departed, fame is like a garland round the neck of a corpse.'

The test of Yudhisthira on the shore of the lake by the Yaksha is explained briefly early in this chapter. Yudhisthira has heard a symposium by the immortal savants on various subjects. He was wandering between Kamyaka Vana (the Forest of Desires) and Dwaita Vana (the Forest of Duality). Dharma tests him and he stands the test. Dharma offers him a boon. Yudhisthira does not ask for anything. He simply says: 'I will accent what you grant', but prays Dharma to bless him that he may have lust, greed and anger in his control at all times, and that his mind may ever be established in charity, austerity and truth. May the Supreme Being give us all this strength of mind and steadiness of purpose.

CHAPTER FOUR

Book IV

VIRATA PARVA

This Fourth Book has five sections.

At the commencement, Yudhisthira hands over the Arani to the Brahmin who had lost it. He then calls a council of the younger brothers and tell them that the twelfth year of their exile is coming to an end, and they should now make arrangements to stay incognito with someone for a year Yudhisthira also explains the position to the Brahmins staying with him, and tells them that if the are found out during the year's stay, they must go into exile for a further twelve years. He is very much disturbed at having to ask the Brahmin to go away, and grieves again and again at the situation, the result of the jealousy of the step brothers. Priest Dhaumya consoles him by citing instances of great men who underwent similar dilficulties.

After discussion, the brothers decide to live Virata Nagara. Yudhisthira is to go in the guise of a Yati and be a courtier in the king's cour Bhima says that he will go and serve in Virata’s kitchen as a cook. Arjuna decides to utilise the curse of Urvasi and go as a eunuch, and teach dancing and music to the Princess, King Virata’s daughter. Nakula and Sahadeva decide to go as

trainers of horses and cows respectively. Draupadi says she will go as a Sairandhri (a maidservant in the women's quarters).

The Brothers send away Indrasena and other servants who accompanied them from Khandava- Prastha. Priest Dhaumya advises on the mode of life in a king's household.

They take leave of Dhaumya and eventually arrive near Virata Nagara. The Brothers bundle up their bows and arrows and hide the bundle on a Shami tree in the funeral yard at the outskirts of Virata Nagara. While placing the bundle, Yudhisthira offers prayers to the spirits of air, water, the forest, the sun, and the moon, to take care of the bundle and give it either to Arjuna or him- self. He also begs that the bundle may not be given to Bhima as he is ever short-tempered and angry about the Kauravas. He might take the bundle in a fit of anger and attack the Kauravas, in which case the brothers will have to go into the wilderness again for another twelve years. Yudhisthira says: "We will destroy the sons of Dhritarashtra if they do not keep their word after the period of thirteen years is over." The brothers offer homage to the different spirits, go round the Shami tree, and then start towards the city of Virata.

Yudhisthira's entry into the court of Virata in the guise of a Yati, appeared like Brihaspati entering the court of Indra, the celestial king. King Virata is surprised at his personality, and gets up to receive him. All the courtiers get up when the king stood up.

The king enquires of Yudhisthira particulars of his name and occupation, etc. Yudhisthira ans. wers carefully and expresses a desire to stay in the king's court for one year. The king agrees.

One by one the other brothers enter the court in their different guises as originally arranged, and seek employment. The King duly employs them. Draupadi comes as a Sairandhri and enters the Queen's chamber, asking for employment. At first the Queen feels nervous about having a woman of Draupadi's beauty in the palace, fearing that the males of the royal family might lose their heads, but she engages Draupadi in the end.

The brothers and Draupadi live in the court, waiting for the completion of the agreed period. They are as quiet as if they had entered their mother's womb.

In the meantime, Keechaka, brother of the Queen, sees Sairandhri one day and becomes infatuated at her beauty. He begs her to become his mistress, but she refuses. He pesters her, but she will not agree. Then he prevails upon the Queen to send Sairandhri to his residence on some pretext. The Queen advises her brother not to behave in this way, but he does not heed her advice. He worries her until under pressure she agrees to send Sairandhri. Next day she asks Sairandhri to go to her brother's house and fetch some liquor. Sairandhri politely requests the Queen to send someone else, explaining how the brother had tried to harass her. The Queen snubs her and commands her to go and fetch the liquor. Draupadi goes reluctantly, praying to the Sun God on the way, to protect her. The Sun God sends a powerful demon with her for protection. When she gets to his house, Keechaka tries to molest her. Draupadi throws down the vessel and runs towards the King's Court. Keechaka chases her and kicks her. she falls down. The courtiers are highly indignant at Keechaka's behaviour and shout out that this is improper. At this, the demon sent by Surya attacks Keechaka who falls down, vomiting blood. Bhima, hearing the disturbance, comes there and stares angrily at an ancient tree in the courtyard. Yudhisthira understands his thoughts and tells him: 'Brother, this tree is ancient, and has given shelter to so many. If you require firewood, go to some other tree.' What he meant was-Bhima had in mind rooting up the tree and destroying the King, his brother-in-law and others. Yudhisthira read Bhima's thoughts, hence he told him, by the reference to the tree, that the King is protecting Imany people and should not be destroyed. Bhima goes away. Draupadi

protests indignantly and loudly. The King is afraid of his brother-in-law and is silent. Draupadi looks at Yudhisthira. He advises her to put up with the insult, as her husbands are awaiting the proper time.

Sairandhri goes to her quarters. Brooding ver her insult she decides to talk to Bhima and meets him that night. She recalls the past days of glory while at Indraprastha and bewails the condition to which they have all been thrust, and coaxes Bhima to find a way to destroy the villian Keechaka. They converse for a while, then Bhima tells her to ask Keechaka to come secretly at night to the place where dance and music is taught. It would be empty then, and there Bhima would kill the villian. Sairandhri is elated and goes away. Next day, in the course of her duties, she meets Keechaka who starts teasing her. She tells him to meet her in secret at night in the dance hall. Bhima is waiting there before Keechaka arrives. Keechaka comes there in the darkness and embraces Bhima, believing him to be Sairandhri. Bhima and Keechaka wrestle and Keechaka is killed. Bhima leaves the corpse, and goes to his quarters, after bathing and changing his clothes.

Sairandhri calls out to the watchmen that Keechaka was destroyed by her husbands, the Gandharvas, as he tried to molest her. The Upakeechakas, younger brothers of Keechaka, come there and see the fate of their valiant brother. They are enraged. They inform the king of the occurrence and ask his permission to burn Sairandhri on the funeral pyre with Keechaka's corpse, as she was responsible for his untimely end. The King is afraid of them and agrees to their suggestion They tie Sairandhri to the hearse conveying the dead body and start towards the cremation ground Sairandhri calls out the code name previously agreed upon and shouts for aid, explaining that the brothers of Keechaka are dragging her to the cremation ground. Bhima uproots a tree and uses it as a weapon to attack the Upakeechakas, whom he destroys. He then returns to the kitchen. Sairandhri goes to the women's apartment.

The citizens acquaint the king of these happenings and request him to send Sairandhri away, as the stay of a woman of her beauty in the city would cause the destruction of many more valiant ones. The King asks the Queen

to send Sairandhri away. Sairandhri begs the Queen to allow her to stay for only one more month, as the period of her austerity would be completed by then. She promises the Queen that she will definitely leave the city at the end of the month, and that all prosperity will attend the Royal Family for this kindness. The Queen is afraid of Sairandhri quietly consents to her request. and

Spies of the Kauravas visit the city of Virata, note the happenings there, and conclude that the Pandava brothers are hiding there. Keechaka, Demon Bana and Bhima are three valiant ones of equal strength and no outsider could kill any one of these three. Hence they conclude that Bhima, in hiding, has killed Keechaka. They return to the Kauravas and inform them of the happenings at the city of Virata.

Duryodhana calls for a council. Acharya Drona tells that it is impossible for the Kauravas to conquer the Pandavas, so they should trace the Pandavas before the agreed period is over send and them back into exile.

Bhishma describes the conditions of the place where Yudhisthira lives and advises Duryodhana to come to terms with the Pandavas, as they are virtuous people and it will not be possible to conquer them.

Duryodhana concludes that the Pandavas are undoubtedly hiding in the capital of Virata and sends a small force to carry away the cows of Virata. Yudhisthira does not take food when even a small animal is hungry. If the cows do not return in the evening all the calves would be starving, when the younger brothers will have to come out and fight to release the cows, thus exposing themselves.

Duryodhana commissions Susharma, the King of Trigarta, to organise the capture of the cattle of Virata, and this he does. King Virata starts out with an army to release the cattle; Yudhisthira and Bhima accompany the King. In the battle Susharma defeats Virata and takes him prisoner. Yudhisthira commands Bhima to fight for Virata's release. Bhima accomplishes this successfully and also takes Susharma a prisoner. Yudhisthira kindly

releases the Trigarta King. The party return to the capital, but in the meantime, another contingent sent by Duryodhana has surrounded the gate in the northern side, and captured the cattle. The cowherds go to inform Prince Uttarakumara (Virata's son) of the occurrence. The Prince, surrounded by his sister and other young maidens, boasts of his own valour, but deplores his inability to fight for the release of the cows, as he has no charioteer. Through Sairandhri, Arjuna informs the Princess that the Prince may use the dancing teacher as a charioteer (Arjuna is now known as Brihannale). The Princess informs her brother of the capabilities of the dancing instructor to serve as a charioteer, and after some discussion, the Prince agrees to take Brihannale to drive his chariot.

The Prince starts for the battle, and the Princess requests her teacher to fetch the jewels and ornaments of the foes vanquished by her brother.

When King Virata and party are on their way to the capital, Yudhisthira (now known as Kanka) advises the King to send word to the city that the King is returning after annihilating the enemy force. The King does so reluctantly.

When Prince Uttarakumara gets just a glimpse of the vast army of the Kauravas he loses heart, jumps down from the chariot and runs away. Arjuna backs the chariot, gets down and catches hold of the Prince, ridiculing him for his timidity. The Prince has no heart to fight. Arjuna makes the Prince drive the chariot, and, after obtaining the bundle of bows, arrows, etc., from the Shami tree, starts towards the Kaurava army. He shoots powerful arrows and annihilates the enemy, then he asks the Prince to collect jewels and ornaments from the fallen. He extracts a promise from the Prince that he will not divulge the identity of the Pandavas in the capital. After collecting the valuables, the party return. On the way Arjuna takes over the reins again and puts the Prince in the chariot. He sends word to the gate that the Prince is returning after defeating the foes.

The King and Kanka are playing dice when the news of the Prince's exploits reaches them. The King is jubilant and praises his son. Kanka tells him that it is the dancing instructor who has really defeated the enemy. An argument

ensues, and the King, in a temper, strikes Kanka below the ear with the dice. Blood flows out of the wound, and Sairandhri runs up to stop the blood, with the end of her own sari. The King is surprised and asks the reason. She says that if a drop of Kanka's blood falls on the earth, the land will have to suffer a drought for seven years. (In fact, Arjuna had once taken a vow that he would wipe out the entire family of the person who sheds a drop of Yudhisthira's blood.)

The Prince returns with pomp and arrives at the palace. Entering the inner chambers, he prostrates before his father. He sees the wound of Yudhisthira and, fearing the consequences of Anjuna's wrath, asks his father the cause of the wound. The King explains, and the Prince asks his father to beg pardon of Kanka. The King praises his son for his valour. The Prince says tha a celestial being came and won the battle for him Arjuna gives the Princess and her maids the valuables collected from the battlefield.

That night the brothers meet in council. Arjuna and Bhima question Yudhisthira about the cause of his wound. When he explains, they get angry and shout that they will destroy the King with all his family. Yudhisthira pacifies them. He tells them they should occupy the King's throne on the morrow, and if the King objects or behaves improperly, they may attack him.

Next morning, the brothers dress themselves like Princes and Yudhisthira occupies the King's throne. When the King protests at this behaviour, Arjuna informs him of Yudhisthira's right to occupy his seat. Then Prince Uttarakumara enlightens his father as to the real identity of the Brothers and Draupadi. Virata begs Yudhisthira's pardon, and gives them costly presents. Then he requests Arjuna to marry his daughter Princess Uttara, but Arjuna explains that this procedure is not possible. However, he agrees to take the Princess as his daughter-in-law by arranging her wedding with his son.

Duryodhana sends a messenger informing the Pandavas that they must go into the wilderness agian as they have exposed themselves before the time is up.

Yudhisthira directs Duryodhana to ask Bhishma's opinion. completed. Bhishma says that the period is

At the conclusion of the thirteenth year, Sri Krishna and Balarama arrive at Upaplavya with Subhadra and Abhimanyu. Draupadi's father and brother also arrive. The wedding of Princess Uttara (Virata's daughter) with Abhimanyu is celebrated

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The Fourth and the Fifth Books are of special importance. The Fifth describes both the preparations for a material battle as well as the Spiritual Battle. The Fourth Book contains clear clues that establish Mahabharata as a treatise on Yoga. These two Books appear to have been interfered with a lot by scholars.

The disguises that the brothers assume, the services they select, and the names they give to Virata, are all clues to Yogic interpretation Mahabharata. of

After testing Yudhisthira in the Dwaita Vana Dharma gives him a boon by which he could assume any guise and form whenever he wishes.

Yudhisthira assumes the form of a Yati. The King and the courtiers are all attracted by his personality and the whole assembly rises to receive him. He is given a seat. Enquiring of Yudhisthira's whereabouts, the King says: 'Sadhus are always truthful, particularly when they are Parivrajakas. A few verses earlier, is a saying that Yudhisthira entered the Court equipped with Tridanda', wearing a turban and holding a Sikya. In some versions the word 'Sumundita' is found. These words have perhaps given scholars the iden that Yudhisthira arrived in the garb of a Sannyast The word 'Yati', while meaning a Sannyasi, also means 'a person seeking protection under somebody'. 'Tridanda' means Vak, Kaya, and Mano Danda control of the speech, body and mind. 'Sumindita' means well-shorn of the mental ills, anger, hatred, etc.

*** यतिः पाराशरी भिक्षुः परिब्राट् पाररक्षितः**

अनाशकी प्रब्रजितः कर्मन्दी' मग्करी यती ।। (अनेकार्थनंजरी)

Yudhisthira is known as a truthful person. For uttering an apparent lie he had to have the vision of hell on his journey towards heaven.

The utterances of the brothers before Virata give definite clues to the Yogic interpretation, and have double meanings,

Bhima says that he is a Sudra. Nakula and Sahadeva say that they are Vaishyas.

While asking for five villages, Yudhisthira names Avisthali, Vrikasthali, Makandi, Varanavatham, and any other one.

In the Northern recensions of the Mahabharata, there is a chapter in the Aswamedha Parva where all motive forces in the Human Body are divided into caste distinctions. The Five Pranas are of four castes. This is on account of the service they do individually. Prana is in the Varanavatha (heart region). Apana, is in Vrikasthala (the abdominal region). The hunger of the wolf is proverbial. The human stomach eats and digests and is always ready to eat again. The Vayus Samana

and Udana residing in the navel and throat regions respectively take care of the senses, the horses and the cows in this body. Nakula and Sahadeva respectively select the profession of horse-trainer and cattle supervisor. Vyana Vayu is pervading the whole body. As it has no fixed abode the fifth village was not named by Yudhisthira.

Prana is the offspring of Yama. Yama is also described by the names Vyaghrapada and Kanka (the tiger-gaited one and the eagle) since Yama snatches away human lives suddenly in one sweep, as tigers and kites carry away their prey.

The destruction of Keechaka is undoubtedly some process of Yogic Kriya in which the Apana Vayu is to function. When the Kauravas carry away Virata's cattle, they do this in the southern and northern regions of the capital. When Virata goes towards the southern side to fight with Susharma, it is Bhima who fights and gains victory

Arjuna and Prince Uttarakumara go toward the north. Clearly the directions north and south indicate north and south in the human body.

The Virata Parva surely deals with a situation describing the progress of the Jiva in its journey towards perfection, becoming conscious of the Virat Swaroopa of the creation and its own insignificance. As long as the Jiva is full of self-importance, it has a high opinion of itself. Once it has the knowledge of the microcosm and the macr cosm, it becomes aware of its insignificance and lives as if incognito. In other words, it loses its feeling of individual greatness.

CHAPTER FIVE

Book V

UDYOGA PARVA

The Fifth Book is of ten sections.

After celebrating the wedding of Abhimanyu and Princess Uttara, Sri Krishna speaks in the assembly of the troubles undergone by the Brothers. The Assembly decides to send messengers to Dhritarashtra. Balarama defends the Kauravas in the Assembly. Satyaki puts up a strong objection to Balarama's stand. Drupada and others speak. Drupada's priest is sent as a messenger to Dhritarashtra. Messengers of King Virata and Drupada travel

round and invite all kings to a council. Sri Krishna approves of King Virata's action and departs to Dwaraka.

Duryodhana and Arjuna both go to Dwaraka to see Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna is asleep when they arrive. Duryodhana enters the chamber first and occupies a seat near the head of Sri Krishna. Arjuna enters a little later and respectfully stands at the feet of Sri Krishna. When Sri Krishna awakes, he sees Arjuna first, then he turns round and sees Duryodhana. Sri Krishna enquires the reason for their arrival, and both explain that they seek his aid. Duryodhana claims priority as he arrived first. Sri Krishna says that Arjuna should have the first choice as he saw him first. He then informs them both that he will not personally fight in battle, but he will be on one side and his Narayani Sena would be on the other. Asked to select what they wish, Arjuna asks for Sri Krishna on his side, even though he will not fight, and Duryodhana is highly elated that he is able to get the Narayani Sena on his side.

Balarama informs them that he will not fight on any side in this battle, but will be neutral. He explains his decision and exhorts them to fight virtuously.

Sri Krishna asks Arjuna why he selected him instead of the army. Arjuna replies that he wants Sri Krishna to be his charioteer and guide his efforts, and Sri Krishna agrees.

Shalya, king of Madra, starts for the Pandava camp on getting news through messengers. On the way he enters Duryodhana's camp by mistake. He is served very well there and is highly pleased. Duryodhana comes to meet him and Shalya asks him what is his wish. Duryodhana requests Shalya to join his side in the forthcoming battle. Shalya agrees, reluctantly, then goes on to Yudhisthira and informs him that he was duped by Duryodhana. He then promises to help the Pandavas in the battle.

In conversation with Shalya, Yudhisthira deplores his own fate at having to undergo so many difficulties. Shalya tells him that even Indra, the celestial king, was not free from difficulties. He describes how Indra had to hide in

disgrace, leaving his kingdom to Nahusha; how Nahusha foolishly courted Indra's wife, and as a result lost the celestial throne and became a snake at the curse of Agastya.

Shalya then takes leave of Yudhisthira and goes to Duryodhana's camp. Satyaki and other kings arrive at the Pandava camp with their armies. King Bhagadatta and others come with their armies and join Duryodhana.

The priest of Drupada reaches Hastinapura and conveys the message of Drupada and others. Bhishma accepts the arguments of the priest on behalf of the Pandavas, but Karna disagrees and says that the Pandavas exposed themselves before their time and should wait for a further period of thirteen years. Dhritarashtra sends Sanjaya to the Pandavas as his messenger, scorning his sons and praising the Pandavas.

Sanjaya reaches Upaplavya and conveys Dhritarashtra's good wishes to the Pandavas. Yudhisthira asks after the welfare of Dhritarashtra and others. Sanjaya decries fighting, and conveys the desires of Bhishma and Dhritarashtra that the Pandavas should practise forbearance.

Yudhisthira reviews the prospects of both fations, and asserts that his army could easily defeat the Kauravas. He says that peace would be possible if the Kauravas would agree to return to the Pandavas what belonged to them.

Sanjaya says that war causes great loss of life. Even if the opposing party has failed to fulfil its obligations, forbearance on the part of the Pandavas would be a great virtue.

Yudhisthira says that it is impossible for all and sundry to decide the rights and wrongs of the question, but that he would only follow the advice of Sri Krishna.

Sri Krishna says that both the Pandavas and the Kauravas are all one to him, hence he says he will come and talk to Duryodhana.

Sanjaya takes leave of Yudhisthira, who sends his regards to Bhishma and all others, according to their status. He requests Sanjaya to convey his prostrations to Bhishma and Dhritarashtra and beg them to arrange a peaceful settlement. He asks Sanjaya to remind them of the neglect shown towards the Pandavas by Duryodhana, and ask him to give at least five villages in order to establish peace.

Sanjaya reaches Dhritarashtra's court and conveys Yudhisthira's messages. He scorns Dhritarashtra's behaviour and says he will come again on the morrow and describe Yudhisthira's messages in greater detail.

Dhritarashtra cannot sleep that night. He sends for Vidura and seeks his counsel. Vidura explains in detail the teachings of great men on how a king and a householder should behave. Dhritarashtra asks Vidura how peace can be established between his sons and the Pandavas. Vidura says that peace is possible by giving the Pandavas their share of the kingdom. He explains how Prahlada and others stood for right conduct even when their own sons were party to the dispute. He details ethical rules and asks the king if he has any more doubts. The king puts some questions on spiritual matters, which Vidura says must be referred to Sanatsujata.

Dhritarashtra asks Sanatsujata to explain what death is, what is the quality of Mowna (silence), and the method of realising the Absolute, and other matters. Sanatsujata answers these questions in detail, concluding his discourse with a description of the glory of the Supreme Being, saying that it is the Yogis who can have the vision of that Ancient One.

(यागिनस्तम् प्रपश्यन्ति भगवन्तम् सनातनम्)

Now King Yudhisthira and the others enter the audience hall to hear Yudhisthira's terms. Then Sanjaya gives the words of Arjuna praising Sri Krishna's greatness.

Bhishma tells Duryodhana that Sri Krishna and Arjuna are Nara and Narayana, and that antagonising them will only result in the destruction of the Kauravas. Then Acharya Bhishma censures Karna for his bold words and vain utterances.

When Dhritarashtra does not accept the advice of Drona and Bhishma, all the Kauravas decide that their end is inevitable.

Dhritarashtra asks Sanjaya what the basis of the Pandava strength is that emboldens them to decide to fight. Sanjaya thinks of the valour and might of the Pandavas and falls into a swoon. Recovering shortly afterwards, he says that the Pandavas have decided to fight supported by Sre Krishna's backing and the aid of other kings.

Dhritarashtra reflects on the valourous deed of Bhima and Arjuna, and becomes highly dejected. He considers the support and help that the Pandavas have obtained, and concludes that a war would result in great loss of life. He says that he will try for a peaceful settlement.

Duryodhana says that he would fight the Pandavas with the aid of Karna and Dussasana even if Bhishma and Drona do not help him. Again Dhritarashtra censures Duryodhana.

Sanjaya is asked to speak again, and describes Arjuna's words in detail. Arjuna had asked Sanjaya to inform Duryodhana, the prince full of passion, the unwise and sinful, together with the other kings present, that Arjuna would perform a great sacrifice on the spot where the Kaurava army will be destroyed in the fire of Arjuna’s arrows, like offerings in sacrificial fire He would despatch the elephants and I crses to the abode the ancients (Pitri Loka) with bas sharp arrow

Dhritarashtra again begs his sons to come to peaceful settlement, but Duryodhana scorns the sto ries of the Pandavas having the aid of celestial beings. He describes his own prowess, how he cav stay under water (Jala Stambha, and so on, and says that he will definitely destroy the Pandavas.

Karna also ignores Dhritarashtras words and vows that he would destroy the Pandavas. Bhishma ridicules Karna.. Karna vows that he will not take up arms until Bhishma dies and leaves the place. Bhishma says he would destroy ten thousand warriors per day.

Duryodhana exclaims that Bhishma and Drona are well-wishers of the Pandavas. Even if they will not aid the Kauravas, he says he will destroy the Pandavas with the help of Karna and Dussasana. Vidura entreats them to have forbearance.

Vidura quotes the parables of the birds that united and carried away the net in which they were caught. The hunter, who had spread the net, runs after them on the ground. A surprised onlooker questions the wisdom of his chase, but he replies: The birds are united now and are carrying away my net, but they will surely disagree soon!" Dhritarashtra says that the Pandavas are invincible with Sri Krishna's support, and advises Duryodhana to make a peaceful settlement. Duryodhana does not heed his father's advice, and the king leaves the place dejected. He asks Sanjaya to announce that Sri Krishna will shortly come as a mediator.

In the meantime, Yudhisthira has requested Sri Krishna to go to Hastinapura to bring about a peaceful settlement. Sri Krishna listens to the opinion of the brothers one by one, then takes leave of them and departs for Hastinapura.

Omens forecasting the defeat of the Kauravas occur on the way. Sages meet Sri Krishna en route and accompany him. Duryodhana has made elaborate arrangements for his reception, but he ignores them. He halts for the night at Vrikasthala and arrives at Hastinapura in the morning; after accepting Dhritarashtra's Pooja, he leaves for Vidura's house. He meets Kunthi and talks to her. Then he goes to Duryodhana's house where he is invited to dine. Sri Krishna declines, and arrives at Vidura's house where he is welcomed and served with devotion. Sri Krishna and Vidura discuss matters that night, and Sri Krishna informs Vidura that he has come to confer with the Kauravas to avoid people's slander.

Next morning Sakuni and Duryodhana come and invite Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna enters the council hall with Vidura. Sage Narada and others travelling in the sky in Vimanass are welcomed and given seats in the council hall by Bhishma. Sri Krishna tells Dhritarashtra that he has come to arrange a peaceful settlement. He describes the benefits of peace and the bad effects of war. Narada and other sages also speak, eulogising peace and quoting examples of past kings. Duryodhana does not heed their counsel. Even when his mother comes and advises him to avoid war, he will not heed her advice.

Now, Karna, Duryodhana and others conspire to tie up Sri Krishna, but he shows his Viswaroopa in the hall and everyone present sees Sri Krishna in the person opposite him. Dhritarashtra gets sight through Sri Krishna's grace and views the miracle. He then requests to be blinded as before.

Sri Krishna changes into the usual Swaroopa and leaves the place. On the way, he speaks to Kunthi. Then he goes to Karna, telling him that he (Karna) is Kunthi's son and advises him to join the Pandavas. Karna declines on the grounds that he has been in the service of Duryodhana so long that he cannot desert him now.

At the Pandava camp, Yudhisthira asks the opinions of his brothers on the disposition of the army. Sri Krishna returns and is also consulted. Dhrishtadyumna is appointed Chief of the Army. Yudhisthira and his supporters enter Kurukshetra. The army encamps on the battlefield, and separate camps are allotted to important kings.

Duryodhana consults Karna and others, and they, too, proceed to Kurukshetra with their army.

Yudhisthira feels reluctant to start war and is afraid of killing Gurus and elders. Sri Krishna and others convince him of the necessity.

Duryodhana asks Bhishma Acharya to lead the army.

Balarama arrives, highly depressed at the thought of the death of many relatives, and decides to leave. He goes on pilgrimage.

Duryodhana sends Ulooka to the Pandavas with a personal message. The Pandavas receive Ulooka and send individual replies to Duryodhana.

Bhishma allots positions and duties to men in the army. Karna is displeased, feeling that Bhishma did not assign him proper position, and refuses to fight as long as Bhishma is alive.

Bhishma then describes to Duryodhana the strength of both the armies. He states that he will not fight with Sikhandi and cautions the Prince to see that Sikhandi does not come before him, as he would be obliged to throw down his arms. Asked for the reason for this, Bhishma tells the story of Amba and the birth of Sikhandi.

Sikhandi was first born as a girl and subsequently changed into a man through the aid of a Gandharva. Bhishma does not oppose women and could not, therefore, fight Sikhandi.

Both the warring parties divide their respective armies into three parts and prepare for battle.

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In Aswamedha Parva (Book XIV) the human body is divided into two sections. The five Pranas, Buddhi and the Jiva these seven form the Antaratma. The Ten senses and the mind form tire Bahir Atma the outer shell. The battle between these two parties that goes on in the body is the Battle of Kurukshetra.

The Fifth Book describes the preparations for the battle of Kurskshetra. Allegorically, it describes the preparations of the Jiva to win complete control over the body since the turbulent sense which were its guardians in the early stage now. wish to make it a slave.

There are repeated attempts to make a peaceful settlement, but no compromise is possible. War becomes inevitable and preparations are made for it.

In the spiritual war no pprogress is possible without the aid of the Lord. Arjuna and Duryodhana go to Sri Krishna to seek help. Sri Krishna divides himself and his army into two parts and asks the warring parties to select their choice. Duryodhana chooses the army, and Arjuna elects to have Sri Krishna's help and guidance. The wise one is content with the Lord's guidance; the unwise are misled by gifts of strength and wealth, and so on.

Vidura teaches Dhritarashtra the Code of Ethics. Sanatsujata describes the glory of Brahman and the philosophy of life and death, the observance of Mowna (silence), and so on. All these are absolutely essential to the spiritual warrior in his efforts to annihilate the inner enemies.

The Adi-Panchaka, the first five books, deal with the creation of the human body, the entering of the Jiva into this town of nine gates, and the development of the inner seven under the guardianship of the outer eleven. The Jiva becomes aware of its birthright and seeks to obtain it. The outer ones delude and cheat and drive the Jiva into exile. By the grace of the Indweller and the Satsanga of sages, the tenant becomes wise and learned, and negotiates for peaceful settlement. When this effort does not produce any satisfactory result, the

Tenant decides to fight out the battle and annihilate the enemies. This battle is described in the central Six Books known as Madhya Shatka or Yuddha Shatka, The enemies referred to are lust, anger, greed and some others. The first three are described in the Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Books, the Bhishma, Drona and Karna Parvas.

This concludes the first five books.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MADHYA SHATKA OR YUDDHA SHATKA

Book VI

BHISHMA PARVA

The Sixth Book has four sections. The First Chapter of the First Section known as Jamb Khanda Vinirmana Parva contains the rules of war as agreed by the chiefs of both sides.

Some of these conditions are as follows:
At the end of the day's fighting, the contesting parties will move freely with each other.

Cavalry must fight with cavalry; elephant army with elephant army; warriors on chariots with their counterparts, and so on.

When two are engaged in a duel, a third person should not intervene.

When a person is unarmed while fighting, he should not be attacked.

Charioteers, trumpet blowers and such noncombatants should not be attacked.

A person who has divested his armour or is unarmed should not be attacked.

If we remember these conditions and note the way that each of the chieftains is killed, we will observe that this code of war previously agreed upon was totally ignored.

Bhishma was killed when he had thrown down his arms. Karna was killed when he had got down from his chariot and was trying to set right the wheel that had become stuck. Drona was made to give up fighting through a ruse. All these facts, if superficially considered, suggest that the Pandavas were

not honest. Actually the case is different. The code of war decided upon was for the reference of kings of the age.

The battle is an allegory, too. Bhishma, Drona and Karna are examples of how lust, anger and greed are to be conquered. The fight with these is the fight to conquer the three enemies, hence the code of war should not apply when reading the portions describing the destruction of the three warriors from an allegorical point of view.

In the third chapter of the first section exhaustive description of the planetary position forecasting evil to Kauravas is given. The subsequent chapters of this section describe the geography of Bharata Varsha, the continent of India. The description is proper in this place, as it gives the parties an idea of the extent of the land for which they are ready to fight. Before describing the geography of Jambu Khanda, Sanjaya describes the Pancha Maha Bhutas, viz., the five principal elements.

The next section is the Bhumi Parva. In this the seven continents, seven mountains and the seven oceans are described.

The Bhagavad Gita section contains the eighteen chapters of the Gita.

After the Gita Parva comes the Bhishma Vadha Parva. The battle with Bhishma as commander of the Kaurava army lasts for eleven days. On the night of the tenth day Yudhisthira goes to Bhishma and enquires how he could be defeated.. Bhishma says that he would throw down his arms if Sikhandi came in front of him. Next day Sikhandi is made to lead the army. When he comes in the presence of Bhishma, the Grand Old Man throws down his arms. Arjuna shoots arrow after arrow and annihilates him. He falls down, but the arrows have stuck so thick that they support his body and prevent it from touching the ground. The head is hanging, and Bhishma asks for a headrest. Duryodhana brings pillows. Arjuna shoots one arrow and creates a head-rest. Then Bhishma asks for water. Duryodhana brings it in a gold vessel. Bhishma refuses it and looks at Arjuna. Arjuna shoots in front

of him a Varuna Astra. Water gushes up in a flow from the earth to Bhishma's mouth.

He tells them that he will wait till the Sun turns northward and then cast off his body. He advises Duryodhana to make peace with the Pandavas. Duryodhana does not heed.

As already explained, the code of war decided upon is for the use of kings, a lesson in politics.

Kama or Eros, according to Hindu mythology, is Ananga (without body), so he can never have physical enjoyment. He takes pleasure in bringing happiness to others. Bhishma was a celibate, and he arranged marriages of others, so he can be styled as equivalent to Kama. Bhishma was annihilated after Sikhandi was put in front of him. As long as a person feels that he or she is a man or woman, Kama is always on the watch to fight them. Once a person gives up the sex Bhavana and presents a neutral front, Kama throws down his arms, and repetition of the Lord's Name is the series of arrrows shot at him.

Jambhu Khanda means the human body as well as the land of India (*vide* Siva Samhita, chapter two). A thorough knowledge of human anatomy in its various aspects is essential in order to observe the effects of Yogic Sadhana. Different parts of the body are given the names of holy places-veins are named after rivers, other places are named after mountains, and so on. The description Jambu Khanda Vinirmana Parva stands for the creation of the human body.

After conquering the enemies and gaining control over one land, a great king aspires to establish an empire-i.e., to rule the land beyond the seas. The dscription of Bhumi Parva fits in here. In the Yogic sense, the Bhumi Parva describes the stages of evolution - Sapta Bhoomikas - in the Sadhana of Yoga. One description in this section says that persons living in such and such a land are free from old age and death and so on. can achieve immortality merely by living in a land. No one Undoubtedly this portion refers

to the Siddhis that one gains at a certain stage in Yoga Sadhana. The description of the five elements confirms the idea that this section deals with control of body, a product of the five elements.

The Sun, Moon and other planets wiold a great influence over the human body. During the period of eclipse and at certain times when the positions of the planets are such that their influence on the body is weak, an aspirant should do Sadhana and gain control over that sense or senses of the body over which the particular planet has jurisdiction. It is known that the moon has influence on the mind. Similarly with the other planets. To explain this phenomenon, the chapter on planetary position describing evil omens is given in the third chapter of the first section of Bhishma Parva.

The Bhagavad Gita Section deals with the teaching that one should not hesitate to do one's duty through Klybya, as Arjuna did. In addition to teaching the necessity for doing one's d also describes the different paths of the spiritual journey the Bhakti, Jnana and Karma Margas. Further, every chapter ends with a description concluding with the word Yoga and in the text itself both Sankhya and Yoga are extolled, and in one place Yoga has been exclusively praised:

तपस्विभ्योऽधिको योगी ज्ञानिभ्योऽपि मतोधिकः

कर्मिभ्यश्चाधिको योगी तस्माद्योगी भवाजुन ।।

The Yogi is superior to the Tapaswi and even superior to the Inani, he is also superior to the men of action. Hence, O Arjuna, be thou a Yogi.

The last verse of the Gita, which epitomises the teaching of the other sections, contains the description 'Yogiswara' (Lord of Yoga) applied to Sri Krishna. Thus Yoga is highly praised in the Gita.

The Gita is the kernel of the Maha Bharata. Since Yoga is given such prominence here there can be no doubt that the rest of the Maha Bharata, which mentions Yoga directly and allegorically, is a treatise on Yoga.

Resuming the interpretation of the episodes described, the early annihilation of Bhishma may be said to compare with the annihilation of lust. Mere annihilation of lust will not be sufficient unless and until other enemies are conquered. At the conclusion of the war, Bhishma leaves the human body and a spirit enters Sri Krishna. Before this incident, Bhishma has given an extensive lecture on different aspects of Dharma to Yudhisthira. These happenings signify the transformation of lust into Ojas and the aiding of the Sadhaka in union with the Paramatman. Further, once lust is conquered, the resultant celibacy helps latent intellect teaching one a all aspects of one's duty Intellect cannot function properly when anger, greed, etc., are still prevalent in the Sadhaka.

Just before the battle commences, Vyasa Bhagavan comes to Dhritarashtra and intimates thal he will endow him with sight if he cares to view the battle. Dhritarashtra does not wish to see the fratricidal war, but asks Vyasa to enable him hear of the progress of the battle. Vyasa gives the power of Divya Drishti to Sanjaya, who is then able to see everything that happens on the battlefield.

Another peculiarity in the narration of war news deserves notice before we proceed further. At the commencement of each book, the chapter begins with Dhritarashtra hearing news of the death of the hero of that section. The news is told by Sanjaya. Then Dhritarashtra enquires how the said hero fought in the battle, and the description of the battle is given. The firm determinatior. of the Pandavas is sufficient to decide the results of an action, hence the moment the idea of a fight with a person is decided, the enemy is definitely dead. Further, the conquest of one enemy results in easy victory over other foes in subsequent sections.

These points emphasise the importance of a firm determination by a Sadhaka engaged in the spiritual battle. Once he annihilates one enemy with

unshakeable determination, his conquest over other foes in subsequent engagements is definite.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Book VII

DRONA PARVA

The Seventh Book styled Drona Parva has seven sections.

After the fall of Bhishma, Duryodhana and Karna confer. Karna seeks Duryodhana's permission to go to war, and this is given. Karna also requests Duryodhana to appoint Drona as Commander of the Army. The next chapter describes how Drona is killed after a valiant fight lasting four days.

Sanjaya then describes the progress of the battle under Drona's command. On the second day, Drona arranges the army in a special formation (Chakra Vyuha). The Pandavas are engaged elsewhere. No one knows the art of entering the formation except Abhimanyu, who does so, and is surrounded by several warriors and killed from behind by Jayadratha. Arjuna hears of this incident wher he returns, and takes a vow to kill Jayadratha before sunset the next day or jump into a fire-pit and end his own life.

The Kauravas hear of Arjuna's vow and hide Jayadratha so that Arjuna is unable to find hing Arjuna is now in great difficulty, but Sri Krishn comes to his aid. Sri Krishna hurls His discu against the sun and darkness spreads over earth. The Kauravas bring out Jayadratha, thinking it safe now, while Arjuna gets ready to fall into the fire-pit. At that moment Sri Krishna removes His discus and the Sun shines again, disclosing Jayadratha to Arjuna. Arjuna

shoots an arrow which carries away Jayadratha's head, dropping it into the outstretched hands of his own father, engaged in Sandhya Vandana. He throws down the head and is destroyed at once. (Jayadratha had been granted a boon that whosoever should throw down his head would die at once, his own head being shattered to pieces. Sri Krishna saved Arjuna from this fate by ensuring that Jayadratha's head should be thrown into the hands of his own father.)

At the commencement of the battle, Yudhisthira had approached Drona and requested him to inform how he could be defeated. Drona told him that he would throw down his arms when he heard *an unpleasant truth uttered by a reliable person.*

On the fourth day of battle under Drona's command, the Pandavas and Sri Krishna confer on the necessity of inducing Drona to throw down his arms. Bhima goes and kills an elephant named Aswatthama.. The entire Pandava force is made to shout 'Aswatthama is dead!' Drona hears this, but will not believe it until he has heard Yudhisthira confirm it. Sri Krishna shows Yudhisthira the elephant Aswatthama and asks him to shout: Dead is Aswatthama the elephant!" He does so but when he utters the last word, the army sound bugles, trumpets and drums, and Yudhisthira's voice is drowned in the tumult. Drona hears the first portion of the sentence and believes that Aswatthama his son is really dead. He throws down his arms and does Prayopavesa (fasting unto death).

Until now, Yudhisthira's chariot used to be a few inches above the ground on account of his truthful nature and actions. After this incident his chariot came down to ground level.

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Two extraordinary characters are portrayed in this section. One is Acharya Drona, a person who had controlled anger and sublimated it: the next is Aswatthama, the personification of anger. Drona was born in poverty, and he and Drupada studied under one Guru. At that time, Drupada who was a prince promised many things to Drona when he would ascend his father's

throne. After concluding their studies they went their different ways, but later on, Drona who was in very poor circumstances, went to Drupada who was now a king, seeking help. Drupada behaved arrogantly and insulted Drona, who returned empty-handed. With his knowledge of archery, Drona could have easily wiped out Drupada with all his army, but he did not do so. He went to Hastinapura and trained Arjuna in archery, and sent him to defeat Drupada. Arjuna duly defeated Drupada and brought him back prisoner. Drona released Drupada after getting half his kingdom. Afterwards Drupada did a Yajna, praying to the celestial beings to endow hirm with a son able to defeat Drona, and a daughter fitted to become the wife of Arjuna, so that he may have such a heroic person as son-in-law. His boon is granted.

If Drona had destroyed Drupada in the first instance, he would have merely wasted his learning and power. Instead, he trained Arjuna, and thereby gave the world a mighty archer. Arjuna's defeat of Drupada made that king do penance and beget two children of high merit. These incidents show how an intelligent person should utilise his power, and how even his anger may become a blesing to those that injure him. This is a glorious example of the sublimation of anger.

Drona said that he would throw down his arms if he heard an unpleasant truth from the mouth of a reliable person. Truth is often unpleasant, but when one gets angry, he should try to get a reliable person to give his version of the affair or investigate son to give his version of the affair or investigate the reliability of the person who gave the news, then there will be no chance of anger exploding.

Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha by sunset next day or commit suicide, is an example of an angry person's thoughtless behaviour. If Sri Krishna had not come to his aid, Arjuna would have had to die that day.

Hearing of his father's death by trickery, Aswatthama is furious and lets loose Narayana Astra, a very powerful Astra. At Sri Krishna's suggestion, the Pandavas throw down their arms and stand with folded hands, but Bhima does not throw down his mace. The Astra does not attack a person who is

not in fighting array. All are untouched except Bhima whose clothes catch fire. Immediately Sri Krishna and others snatch Bhima's mace and draw him down, and the Astra leaves him.

Finding his Narayana Astra useless, Aswatthama decides to throw Agneya Astra. Vyasa comes and informs him of the futility of it.

Once one has learnt snbmission to the Lord's will, the most destructive forces are ineffectual. If there are certain reservations, the surrender is not complete, as in the case of Bhima and his mace, and one is vulnerable.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Book VIII

KARNA PARVA

The Eighth Book, Karna Parva, has only one section.

Sanjaya returns to Hastinapura and informs Dhritarashtra of Karna's death in the battle. The King falls down in a swoon at this news.

Later, Dhritarashtra asks Sanjaya to give the names of heroes of the Kaurava army that have fallen. Sanjaya names them, then lists those in the Pandava army who have laid down their lives. Then he gives the names of warriors of the Kaurava army who still live.

Dhritarashtra praises Karna's valour and mourns his death. Then he muses over the valour and faults of Duryodhana, and commands Sanjaya to describe the battle between Karna and Arjuna.

Now the Kaurava army is dejected and dispirited at the deaths of the two great heroes, Bhishma and Drona. To infuse courage in them, Duryo-mdhana enlarges on the courage and valour of Karna. Since the death of Dronacharya, Aswatthama, his son, advises Duryodhana to appoint Karna as Commander of the Army. Duryodhana praises Karna and requests him to lead the army.

Duryodhana describes the faults of Bhishma and Drona in a sarcastic way.

Karna accepts the post of Commander of the army and assures Duryodhana that he will destroy the Pandavas without doubt. The battle begins again, and warriors fight duels. There is Sankula Yuddha or mass fighting, and fighting in Vyuha or formations. ends. The sixteenth day of the battle

That night, at the war council, Karna deplores the lack of a charioteer of Sri Krishna's level, and asks Duryodhana to appoint Salya to be his charioteer. Duryodhana approaches Salya with the request. Salya is a Kshatriya by birth, and a king of some position. He is offended at the request to act as charioteer to a Soota's son, and becomes indignant. To pacify Salya and win him over, Duryodhan tells the story of Tripura Dahana.

Taraksha, Kamalaksha and Vidyunmali are three brothers.. They do severe penance, and Brahma comes and asks them to specify the boons they desire. They crave for immortality. Brahma tells them that it is not practicable. Then they specify that they should assume the shape of three winged towns gold, silver, and iron towns that could not be destroyed unless all three were together, and pierced by a single arrow. Brahma grants the boon and departs. Now these demons play havoc in the three worlds. They fly and sit over other towns and destroy them. The celestials are harassed. They unite and approach Brahma, seeking redress. He advises them to go to Rudra. They go and praise Rudra, who agrees to kill the demons. Vishwakarma, the celestial architect, is commanded to prepare a chariot. A beautiful chariot is got ready and now Rudra needs a capable charioteer. Only Brahma would suit the place. The Devas go to him and beg him to come to their aid. After some discussion Brahma agrees, and Rudra starts for the battle. Just at that

moment, the three demon towns have come together. Rudra lets fly one arrow and destroys them. The Devas are over joyed.

Quoting this precedent of a superior acting as the charioteer of a lower grade person, Duryodhana requests Salya to act as Karna's charioteer. To convince him further, Duryodhana describes how Karna was a disciple of Parasurama, and learnt archery from him. Salya agrees to act as charioteer.

Karna starts for the battle, but Karna and Salya have hot words. They have a heated discussion, but eventually they are pacified and proceed. The battle begins. In the fighting Karna defeats Yudhisthira and Bhima.

Yudhisthira feels this defeat keenly. He decries Arjuna's valour and tells him to hand over the Gandiva bow to Sri Krishna. Arjuna is angered and tries to kill Yudhisthira. Sri Krishna prevents him. Then Arjuna tries to kill himself, as penance for having tried to kill an elder brother. Again, Sri Krishna prevents him, advising him that self-praise is equal to suicide. Arjuna praises himself. Now the brothers are united, and Arjuna takes a vow before Yudhisthira that he will destroy Karna in that day's fight. Arjuna departs for the battle amidst good omens.

There is a great fight between Karna and Arjuna. Celestial beings come to see the battle. Karna's chariot wheel gets stuck and Karna gets down to set it right. At that moment, Arjuna cuts off Karna's head with an arrow.

Now Sri Krishna and Arjuna go to Yudhisthira. Arjuna prostrates before Yudhisthira.

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The word 'Karna' means ear. This member of the body conveys sound, which reacts on the body. When the sounds of erotic music enter the ears, the entire body reacts immediately. Lust and anger are influenced to a great extent by the sounds that pass through the ear. Once the emotions are destroyed, sounds will have no evil effects on the ear. When lust is conquered, erotic sounds cannot affect the body as the ear will not be receptive to them.

When sounds of praise pass through the ear, the entire body vibrates and gets excited. Praise increases in volume when one is in the habit of giving charity.

Karna's chief quality was his charitable disposition. In describing his fight with Arjuna, Vyasa Bhagavan uses the name Dhananjaya (the earner of wealth). Some persons of a charitable disposition are, ever fighting with their earning capacity, and their gifts exceed their income. Charity is permitted, and necessary under some conditions, but it must be within the means of the giver. One is permitted the expression of charity so long as the Supreme Giver does not stop sending. When He stops, when the wheel of charity gets stuck, charitable impulse should be annihilated. In a fit of vanity a person should not try to overdraw from the Supreme Banker. The Yogi's aim is to free himself from the cycle of births and deaths. If he overdraws from the Supreme Banker in order to satisfy his own vanity, he will have to be born again and pay back what he has borrowed.

Karna employs Salya as his charioteer on the second day of the battle. 'Salya' means 'lancet'. The human tongue is the sharpest lancet. Words emanating from a praising tongue are inspiring music to any person, similarly sharp words of criticism bring dejection to a person. King Salya had promised Yudhisthira that he would help the Pandavas by becoming Karna's charioteer and by disturbing him through decrying his might and valour. He kept his word. At the commencement of the sixteenth day, before entering the battlefield, King Salya and Karna have hot words, and Karna is disturbed.

In the episode of Salya becoming Karna's charioteer we have an example of a person of charitable temperament employing tongued one to praise him. a fleunt sharp tongued one to praise him.

The episode in which Sri Krishna advises Arjuna that self-praise is equal to suicide, directs the Sadhaka about the pitfalls he may have in his path.

The Khandava Vana Dahana section in the first book describes the process of winning victory over the senses. This is achieved through burning the 'wilderness of pleasures' by regarding all pleasures as dream.

The Tripura Dahana episode in the Karna Parva describes the Vedantin's method of attaining the fourth state (Turiya Avastha) after the three Avasthas, viz., the Jagrat, Swapna and Sushupti, - the waking stage, the dream stage and the deep sleep stage. A person who is established in the fourth stage is free from the effects of praise or blame, pain or pleasure, etc. While the Vedantin attains this stage through a knowledge of Avastha Traya, the Yogi reaches it through Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dhyana and Dharana.

The Tripura Dahana story is an allegorical description of the teachings of the Mandukya Upanishad. The three demons in the form of three flying towns (the golden town, the silver town and the iron town) are the three demonaic states the waking state, the dream state and the deep sleep state – which sit over this 'Town of Nine Gates' and cause its destruction. The story illustrates the process of destroying the three Avasthas and getting established in the Turiya Avastha or Fourth Stage.

The golden chariot described herein is the human body. Rudra or Umapathy is the only aid to destroy the three stages Brahman is the charioteer. and reach the fourth. According to the Gita OM, TAT, SAT are the three syllables that indicate Brahman. Hence it is clear that employing Brahman as charioteer is chanting OM (Pranava Upasana) and get Rudra's aid to destroy the three demons.

CHAPTER NINE

Book IX

SALYA PARVA

The Ninth Book, Salya Parva has three sections.

This book begins with Sanjaya informing Dhritarashtra of the deaths of Salya and Duryodhana in the battle. The king swoons at the news, and on recovery asks for a description of the fighting.

After Karna's defeat and destruction by Arjuna the Kaurava force is highly disheartened and loses morale. Duryodhana rallies them and prepares to continue the battle. Kripa Acharya speaks to Duryodhana and advises stopping the war and opening negotiation with the Pandavas. Duryodhana rejects the proposal and asks Aswatthama to lead the army. Aswatthama puts forward Salya's name. Salya is appointed commander of the army, and the eighteenth day of the battle begins. There is fierce group and individual fighting. Yudhisthira kills Salya in single combat.

After Salya's fall, Duryodhana himself leads the army and continues the fight. He does not fare well and stages a successful retreat. Most of the Kaurava force is lost.

Duryodhana decides to hide in a lake for the day. Kripa, Aswatthama and Krita Varma meet him on the shore of the lake and approve his plan. A hunter casually passes by that way and recognises Duryodhana. When he meets the Pandavas later, he informs them where Duryodhana is hiding. Yudhisthira and Bhima reach the shore of the lake.
Yudhisthira ridicules Duryodhana who comes out from the lake, and Bhima and Duryodhana fight.
Bhima breaks Duryodhana's thigh with his mace.

Duryodhana falls down and Bhima tramples on his head. Yudhisthira tells Bhima he should not dishonour a fallen foe. The brothers return to their camp.

Aswatthama, Kripa and others come, and see Duryodhana lying injured. They are highly disturbed. Aswatthama vows that he will destroy the Pandavas that night, and Duryodhana makes him chief of the army.

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As already explained, the word Salya means lancet. Every tongue has a sharp lancet. A person who has controlled lust, greed, and anger feels proud of himself and his achievements. He can easily feel superior and use sharp criticism against others and fail to be tolerant towards their faults. This sharp tongue is a great obstacle in the path towards perfection. It should be conquered. The battle with Salya as chief of the army lasted only half a day, so with determination control of this enemy is easy work.

When Duryodhana had fallen down, injured by Bhima, Yudhisthira said: Brother, I have nothing against you, People reap the fruits of their actions. You have come to this state through greed, arrogance and childishness.'

Duryodhana is the personification of ego. Greed and arrogance are the vehicles that help the movement of ego. Once the wheels (the thighs) are broken, ego falls down.* Ego is very subtle and goes and hides in the heart lake when its other associates are annihilated, and waits for a chance to climb out. This subtle enemy should be drawn out and its thighs broken. If this is neglected, the enemy will come up again at a convenient moment and start a powerful battle.

*In the duel between Bhima and Duryodhana, Bhima breaks the thigh of his opponent and tries to trample over his head when he was down. Yudhisthira stops Bhima insulting the enemy thus.
Sympathisign with the fallen man Yudhisthira addresses consoling words to Duryodhana. At the end he says:

अन्मनां त्व्यारायेन महदूमन मीदृशम्

प्राप्तवानसि यल्लोभान्म द्वाब्दाल्याच्च भारत शल्यपर्व ६०-२४

O Scion of the Bharata race! You have come to this state through your own faults. Your present condition is the fruit of your greed, ego and childishness.

CHAPTER TEN

Book X

SAUPTIKA PARVA

Aswatthama and others go and rest under a banyan tree. At night, an owl comes there and starts killing the crows. The crows, being blind, are helpless. Aswatthama thinks over this incident and decides to attack the Pandavas at night. He goes to the Pandava camp, but kills the Upa-Pandavas - the sons of Draupadi — mistaking them for the Pandavas in the darkness.

Yudhisthira and others hear of the death of the children. They go in search of Aswatthama.

Aswatthama reports that he has killed seven persons. Duryodhana dies. The gift of Vyasa to Sanjaya to view the battle from his seat is withdrawn.

Bhima, instigated by Draupadi, tries to kill Aswatthama. Yudhisthira tells him not to do it.

Sri Krishna, Arjuna and others go to see Vyasa and find Aswatthama there. He shoots a powerful Astra on the Pandavas. Arjuna tries to shoot a powerful

Astra but Vyasa stops him. Aswatthama lets go another Astra to destroy the Pandavas entirely. He is prevailed upon by Vyasa and others to withdraw it. As Aswatthama had not kept up celibacy, he is unable to withdraw the Astra. Krishna says that the Astra may kill the child in Uttara's womb and that he would bring it to life again. The child was born dead. Krishna brings it to life and it is later known as Parikshit.

Yudhisthira enquires how Aswatthama could kill so many single-handed. Sri Krishna informs him that it was through the blessing of Rudra.

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Vibrations of anger, once started, continue reacting and cause havoc. Aswatthama, the product of Rudra in the human body, is meant to save the body but causes great destruction.

Allegorically the Upa-Pandavas are the five Pranas, Naga, Koorma. Krikara, Devadatta, Dhananjaya.
Their function is to control and motivate belching, hiccoughing, winking, yawning, etc. When the Yogi reaches the stage of conquest over the principal enemies, these smaller Vayus are destroyed, as they have no useful function. Pranayama and other Kriyas put an end to yawning, blinking, belching, etc.

After the fall of Duryodhana, the description of a great change in the land is given. It says that rivers started flowing backwards, males and females changed their sexes, and so on.

As long as the senses are turbulent, the Nadis that aid spiritual progress are dormant. Once the enemies are annihilated, these Nadis (rivers) start flowing in reverse. Similarly, other forces in the body change their mode. The transcending of limited concepts of sex is a familiar stage in spiritual development.

Prior to the changes in the land, the Pandavas are described as being highly dejected. This is the first result of the annihilation of the enemies (a condition

of Mano Laya). When the turbulent ones are destroyed, the body reacts strongly and is highly dispirited. This leads to the feeling of dejection which is described in the Shanti Parva.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Book XI

STRI PARVA

Sanjaya consoles Dhritarashtra on his bereavement. Vidura quotes scriptures to explain the happening of the inevitable in life. Vyasa comes and offers his sympathy to Dhritarashtra.

Dhritarashtra, accompanied by Gandhari and other ladies of the court, goes to the battlefield Kripa and Krita Varma meet them on the way, and, with the permission of Dhritarashtra, go to the land of their desire.

Yudhisthira and other brothers come to Dhritarashtra, who embraces Yudhisthira lightly and crushes Bhima in a powerful embrace. Sri Krishna, aware of his intentions, presents an iron statue of Bhima: it breaks into pieces at Dhritarashtra's embrace. Afterwards he embraces the Pandavas.

Gandhari intends to curse Yudhisthira, but Vyasa comes and stops her from doing so.

The Pandavas salute Gandhari and Kunti, who converse with Draupadi and offer their sympathies.
Dhritarashtra, surounded by the ladies of the court, enters the battlefield, the women bewailing the loss of their menfolk.

Sri Krishna comes and consoles Gandhari and others. He then advises Yudhisthira to perform funeral rites for the departed.

The Stri Parva refers to the behaviour of the Yogi after annihilating all inner enemies. He is inclined to feel highly self-righteous and have no respect for ladies; and some shun ladies. After destroying the inner enemies the Yogi is nearer to Prakriti. Prakriti tries to serve the son through the daughters. If the Yogi is deluded at this stage and hates women, all his labour will have been in vain. A woman gave birth to the Yogi. Bhakti-Mukthi are all women. So the Yogi should never have feelings of hatred or contempt towards women, otherwise his feeling will be reciprocated by them and his downfall will be inevitable.

This concludes the Six Books of the Battle _ the Madhya Shatka or Yuddha Shatka.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MOKSHA SAPTAKA

Book XII

SHANTI PARVA

The Twelfth Book is in three sections — Raja Dharma Parva, Apad Dharma Parva and Moksha Dharma Parva.

Yudhisthira and others were offering Tillodaka (Til seeds and water usally offered on the bank of a river to the departed souls) to the departed relatives on the banks of the Ganges. Vyasa and Narada come there, and Yudhisthira enquires of Narada the history of Karna. Narada tells the story.

Yudhisthira is highly dejected. One by one the brothers and then Kunti speak to him and infuse enthusiasm in him.

Yudhisthira does not wish to ascend the throne, and feels a strong desire to renounce the world. After much discussion he agrees to rule, then he enters a golden chariot decorated with blankets and Ajinas (Kambals and deer-skin), drawn by sixteen cows, and starts towards his own city (Swa-Puram). He is duly crowned king, surrounded by his brothers and accompanied by Draupadi.

Sri Krishna is there with them. One day, in the course of a conversation, Sri Krishna sits in meditation. Yudhisthira and others are surprised and ask the meaning of this. Sri Krishna replies that Bhishma was meditating on Him and He had to answer him.

Sri Krishna advises Yudhisthira to go to Bhishma and learn the searets of all Dharma, as after Bhishma's death this vast amount of his knowledge will disappear.

Next day, a party sets out and arrives at the place where Bhishma is lying. Yudhisthira asks him questions on Dharma. Bhishma describes political science, the code to be followed at critical junctures, and the codes to be observed to obtain • redemption (Moksha).

The teachings of Bhishma continue for many days, and he quotes story after story to illustrate the subtle path of Dharma.

The dejection of Yudhisthira at the conclusion of the war represents the state of Mano Laya, after all Rajasic forces are annihilated and the body is in a kind of lethargy.

The journey of the king in the golden chariot decorated with Kambala and Ajina and drawn by sixteen cows is the symbolic journey of the Jiva to Self-realisation. The chariot is the body. The cows are the turbulent senses which have now become docile. Kambala and Ajina mean Indriyas and their objects

— these that once disturbed the peace of the tenant of the body, are now decorations of the chariot (the human body).

The coronation stands for 'Swarajya Siddhi'__ complete control over the kingdom of the body.

Bhishma enunciates the different Dharmas.
These teachings of Bhishma contain the essential teachings of most of the Upanishads. At some points, mention is made of Chandogya, at other points the Brihadaranyaka is mentioned. Many of the chapters contain descriptions of austerities and Mantras to achieve purity and overcome difficulties ties.

इन्द्रियं कम्बलं ज्ञेयं कम्वलो रोमजः पटः (अनेकार्थमं जरी)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Book XIII

ANUSASANA PARVA

The Thirteenth Book has two sectnons. The first contains further teachings of Bhishma on the philosophy of charity. As in Shanti Parva, Bhishma quotes stories to illustrate his teachings. Again, in the form of th econversation of Shankara and Parvati, as told by Narada, the steps of Yoga and the hindrances on the path are described.

After a long discourse, Bhishma falls into silence as he becomes aware of the end of his life. Yudhisthira goes home and returns at the appointed time, bringing incense, etc.,Bhishma then takes leave of Sri Krishna, Vyasa and others and casts off the body through the opening at the head.

Dhritarashtra and others unite and perform the funeral rites with pomp and splendour.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Book XIV

ASWAMEDHA PARVA

The Fourteenth Book consists of the Aswamedha and Anu-Gita Parvas. The southern recension contains an extra third section known as Vaishnava Dharma Parva.

After the funeral rites of Bhishma, Yudhisthira is hihly dejected and dispirited at the death of so many relatives. Dhritarashtra consoles him. The old king tells him that all these happenings are the result of his (Dhritarashtra's) rejection of Vidura's advice.

Yudhisthira sits silent, and Sri Krishna comes and tries to console him. Yudhisthira is still dejected and asks Sri Krishna's permission to allow him to renounce the world and go into the forest. At the time Vyas Bhagavan comes there, gives Yudhisthira timely advice, and commands him to perform the Horse Sacrifice to be free of the sin of destroying so many relatives. Yudhisthira answers that he has no money to enable him to perform the Yajna. Vyasa tells him to go to the Himalayas and bring the gold lying there, left by King Maruth after the performance of a Yajna.

Yudhisthira asks for details of the Yajna performed by King Maruth, and Vyasa narrates the story of Samvartha and King Maruth.

Samvartha and Brihaspati are sons of Sage Angirasa. The sage is the family priest of the King Maruth. After the death of sage Angirasa, Brihaspati harasses his brother, who, much disgusted, leaves his home and goes and lives in Varanasi. King Maruth desires to perform a Yajna. He speaks to Brihaspati who agrees to officiate as Priest. Meanwhile, Indra hears of this and tells Brihaspati not to officiate — he argues that after serving as priest to celestial beings like Indra, he should not serve mere mortals. Brihaspati agrees, and informs King Maruth that he is unable to officiate as priest in the sacrifice that the king proposes to perform. The king returns to his capital highly dejected. On the way, sage Narada meets him and enquires the reason for his gloom. The king tells the sage of his great disappointment through Brihaspati. Sage Narada then advises the king to go to Samvarta, the brother of Brihaspati, living at Varanasi, and prevail upon him to officiate as priest. The king is highly elated, and enquires of the sage the way of finding Samvarta and the method of inducing him to come and officiate. Sage Narada says: 'He leads a carefree life in the guise of a lunatic. He lives constantly at Varanasi. Go to the gate of Varanasi and throw down a corpse. He that turns back (recedes) on looking at the corpse is Samvarta. Follow him wherever he goes. Talk to him in seclusion and respectfully seek his aid. If he enquires as to who gave you the whereabouts of his stay, tell him: 'Sage Narada informed. If he asks: 'Where is Narad now?, answer him: 'Narada entered into fire after giving me the information.'

The king accepts the sage's advice and departs.
He reaches Varanasi and duly places a corpse at the gate of the city, as instructed by Narada. In a moment, a learned Brahmin comes there and, looking at the corpse, retreats at once. The king follows. Samvarta throws mud and refuse at the king and spits on him. The king follows him persistently. Then, finding no way of escape, Samvarta becomes calm and sits down in the shade of a banyan tree.

He then asks the king who gave news of him. The king tells him it was sage Narada, and says: 'After giving me the information, the sage entered into fire. I have high respect for you, as you are the son of my Guru.'

Samvarta is highly pleased at the king's words, but speaks rather stiffly, thus: I am liable to be affected by wind. My intellect is not always under my control. How can I assist you? My brother is highly intelligent and capable. Why not go to him? He is friendly with Indra. Harassed by my elder brother I have given up everything. Unless Brihaspati agrees, I cannot officiate as priest. You should go to him and get his permission to employ me.

King Maruth says: 'I had been to Brihaspati first. He flatly refused to serve me, saying that Indra had prohibited him from officiating as priest in the Yajna that I wish to perform. I have no inclination to go and see Brihaspati again after being rejected by him.'

Samvarta says: If you employ me, Indra and Brihaspati will get angry and try to influence you.
Assure me that you will stand by me at all costs.
If you desert me and cause me anger, I will destroy you and your entire family?'

The king says: 'If I fail to keep my word to you, let me not have salvation so long as the sun is shining in the world, and so long as the great mountains are standing.'

Samvarta says: 'Your determination is creditable. I will help you. I have no desire for wealth or position. I will officiate as priest to disconcert my brother as well as Indra.' Then Samvarta tells the king: 'Mahadeva, the consort of Uma, lives on the summit of the Mountain Munchavan, by the side of the Himalayas. Beside this mountain, Kubera and Yakshas guard immense wealth. Go there and prostrate to Siva, the Maha Yogeshwara, and recite His Name, glorifying His great deeds'

The king duly follows Samvarta's instructions.
As a result he secures vast wealth and starts making arrangements for the sacrifice on a very grand scale
.

Brihaspati hears the news of Samvarta aiding the king. He is highly disturbed by envy and grows thin from day to day, brooding on this turn of events. Indra observes his condition and asks him the reason for it. Brihaspati tells Indra of the agreement between Samvarta and King Maruth. Indra tries to pacify Brihaspati, but envy about his brothers's progress dominates him, and he prevails upon Indra to prevent the sacrifice.

Indra then despatches Agni as his messenger to the king and advises him to stop the sacrifice. Agni enters the Yajnashala and everyone is surprised at his appearance, in person. The king receives him with honour and Agni delivers Indra's message. The king does not heed his words. Agni threatens him with Indra's wrath.

Samvarta now comes forward and tells Agni that he, Samvarta, will destroy both Agni and Indra if they do not behave properly. Agni leaves the place and goes to Indra. When Indra hears the news, he asks Agni to go again, but Agni declines, expressing fear of Samvarta who is a great Brahmachari.

Indra thereupon sends a Gandharva to induce King Maruth to give up the appointment of Samvarta and engage Brihaspati. The king refuses. Indra then goes with a great force to destroy the Yajna. His efforts are in vain.

Samvarta invites the celestial beings. They arrive there in person to receive offerings. The king receives them all with great respect. The sacrifice is performed. Indra gives the king boons which he desires.

Sri Krishna now describes to Yudhisthira the battle between Indra and Vritrasura, and explains the two types of diseases affecting the human body _mental ills and physical ills. The battle between them is to be fought single-handed without arms or assistants. Then Sri Krishna emphasises the impossibility of destroying lust, and explains how it can be controlled instead. After describing Kama Gita, Sri Krishna advises Yudhisthira to perform the Horse Sacrifice (Aswamedha) and assures. him that great benefits will follow its performance.

Vyasa, Narada and Sri Krishna offer their sympathies to Yudhisthira, who is still overcome by the loss of so many relatives, then they leave. Yudhisthira goes to Hastinapura with the brothers and elders, and lives in peace, making arrangements for the Yajna.

One day, when Arjuna and Sri Krishna are sitting in the council hall, Arjuna respectfully requests Sri Krishna to repeat the Gita teachings, saying that he has forgotten most of the words of Sri Krishna, being unable to concentrate on the battlefield. Sri Krishna says that Arjuna's behaviour is highly objectionable, and says it is not possible for him to repeat the Gita to him. However, he is willing to add a few words. Then Sri Krishna gives talks supplementing the Gita teachings, known as Anu Gita. After these teachings, Sri Krishna and Arjuna leave for Hastinapura. They release the sacrificial horse, which must wander through the kingdom and invite challenge. Arjuna follows the horse, fights the kings that hold it up, and conquers them. After a year, they return to Hastinapura, and Yudhisthira performs the sacrifice. When it is concluded, Yudhisthira honours all the kings that attended and sends them to their homes laden with rich gifts.

While the brothers are sitting in the Yajnashala, a mongoose comes out of a hole in the ground and rolls on the floor. Half of the body of the creature is golden, the other half normal. After rolling around, it shouts out: 'Alas, is that all? This sacrifice is not at all as great as the one performed by the Brahmin with a morsel of flour!'

Yudhisthira and others are extremely surprised and ask the mongoose for particulars of the sacrifice. They are told that there was a Brahmin who lived by picking up grains, who was once fasting for several days. Then he gets a little flour, and after ablutions the family get ready to eat. An aged Brahmin, a hungry guest, walks in at this moment. The members of the family, viz., the Brahmin, his wife, son and daughter-in-law, one by one offer the old Brahmin their share of the food. He eats and is satisfied, then he shows them his real Swaroop (form). He was Dharma who had come to test them. He is highly pleased and takes them all to the celestial regions in a celestial car. That night, the mongoose who lived there in a hole, came out and rolled on the

floor. A few grains of the flour were lying there, and turned half of the mongoose's body golden. Hence it had been going and rolling on the floors of Yajnashalas in the hope of turning the other half of its body a golden colour, but had been unsuccessful.

At the conclusion of this story, Vaishampayana tells Janamejaya that charity and good conduct will take one to heaven: animal sacrifices are not necessary.

Kings of yore performed the Horse Sacrifice. This ensured that their power was undisputed all over their territory. The gifts of vast amounts of gold and other valuables were an outlet of the right type for their wealth, and resulted in high spiritual benefits for them.

In the spiritual sense, the horse sacrifice has a special meaning. The senses are the horses. The sense-objects are the territory ruled over by the tenant of the "Town of Nine Gates'. So far, earlier chapters have described allegorically the method of conquering the senses one by one. If, however, mere suppression of the senses alone ensured salvation, then the deaf, dumb, blind and so on, should be specially eligible! Actually the conquest should be such that the senses are not affected even when moving amongst the sense-objects, as shown symbolically by the journey of the horse through the kingdom. Such a conquest is possible only after reaching the Samadhi stage. This process is explained in the narrative of King Maruth's sacrifice.

The name Maruth means wind, i.e Prana. Brihaspati is intellect. We often come across comparisons that so and so is equal to Brihaspati in intellect. Indra is the dweller in the human body. at three positions, namely the eyes, the throat and the heart. He rules the field of pleasures, known as Indraprastha. The senses are under his control. The Jiva, seeking redemption, tries to sit in Samadhi and have the Darshan of Umapati. The Intellect, Brihaspati, agrees to aid the Jiva, but such a contingency will cause loss of position to Indra. who prevails upon the intellect not to assist the Jiva., Brihaspati acts according to Indra's instructions. (This Indra is different from Indra, the king of the celestial regions.)

At this juncture sage Narada appears and aids the Jiva.

'Narada' means 'one who is free from sensual excitement' (Arada means sensual excitement; Na plus Arada means without sensual excitement.) This could be interpreted as some type of intuitive knowledge resulting from the conquest of the senses. Narada directs King Maruth to go to Varanasi.

When people bathe in the Ganges at Varanasi, they repeat the following Sankalpa:

असिवरुणायोर्मध्ये आनन्दवने भहास्मशमे गौरीमुखे

त्रिकण्टक विराजिते भागीरय्याः पश्चिमे तीरे

Between the rivers Asi and Varuna, in Ananda Vana, in Maha Smashana, at the conflux of Gauri, at the place which shines over the Trident on the Western Bank of Bhagirathi.

The entire description in these lines corresponds with the position between the eye-brows in the human body, known in Yogic language as Varanasi. The rivers Asi and Varuna are the Nadis Surya and Chandra. Ananda Vana means the place of extreme pleasure: he that takes the Prana to this position in Samadhi experiences extreme bliss. Maha Smashana is the grand funeral ground, the place where all material pleasures are continuously cremated. Gauri is Kundalini; she unites with her Lord Umapati or Siva at this place, hence the place is called Gauri Mukha. Trikantaka means trident. The three states, Jagrat, Swapna and Sushupti are the three minute points that support the human body. Thus, asking one to go and have the Darshan of Umapati at Varanasi means, in the Yogic language, to sit in Samadhi.

Samvarta means 'lid'. Narada directs the king to throw a corpse at the gate of Varanasi. This is an instruction to do Kumbhaka Kriya when the Prana reaches this position. But Samvarta tests the Prana by spitting, throwing

phlegm, etc. The Sadhaka should proceed persistently without giving in. Samvarta is a type of subtle intellect that aids the Sadhaka now. The gross intellect is offended. Brihaspati complains to Indra, who sends Agni. Vaishwanara (gastric fire) attends the Yajnashala in person. This explains a situation in Sadhana to attain Samadhi when the gastric fire becomes highly active. At this stage Yogis get excessive hunger. The Agni should be treated with respect. Samvarta is powerful, so the other fire retreats. Then Indra sends a Gandharva. Temptations are thrown in the path of the Sadhaka to prevent him from achieving his goal. If he does not persevere, Samvarta will be angry. The Sadhaka should ignore the words of the Gandharva. Then Indra will come in person and put hindrances. If now the Sadhaka perseveres, plods on and reaches his goal, he gets the Darshan of Umapati and gains immense spiritual treasure. Then his Horse Sacrifice (allowing the senses to wander among their sense-objects) is easy.

The story of the mongoose, and the moral seem to be an addition by some enthusiast bent on prevention of cruelty to animals! It does not seem relevant here. If the horse sacrifice, episode was not found here, the purpose of the entire work would have failed. While specifying the duty of a king at a certain stage, the episode directs the Yog bent upon achieving complete rule over his territory (the human body) to take the necessary action that will give him unrestricted rule. This is the turning point in the glorious journey of life.

The story of King Maruth is also an excellent illustration of the work of envy. Brihaspati is great scholar and in a very high position. Even so, he cannot bear to see the success of his brother. Envy enters and rules the head of even the greatest scholars.

Thus, the story has a three-fold purpose.. It gives instructions to a king to perform the horse sacrifice at a certain stage (Yudhisthira is used as the means to illustrate this lesson to kings): for the Yogi, the episode describes the process of attaining Samadhi: for the Sadhaka, it cautions against a great pitfall in his path - envy.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Book XV

ASHRAMA VASA PARVA

The Fifteenth Book has three sections: the Ashrama Vasa Parva, the Putra Darshana Parva, and the Narada Agamana Parva.

Yudhisthira is now ruling his empire. Kunti and Draupadi treat Gandhari with great respect.
With the exception of Bhima, the other brothers are extremely considerate to Dhritarashtra.

Yudhisthira speaks to his brothers and the citizens, emphasising the necessity of proper behaviour to Dhritarashtra. He declares that he who behaves well towards the Old King is Yudhisthira's bosom friend; and he that ill-treats the Old King is Yudhisthira's enemy..

Bhima finds it difficult to forget the faults of the Old King's sons, and uses harsh words towards the old man whenever he gets a chance. The Old King approaches Yudhisthira and informs him of his desire to go and live in the forest with Gandhari.

Yudhisthira declares emphatically that he has absolutely no ill-will towards the Old King for the past actions of his sons. Vyasa arrives at this juncture and advises Yudhisthira on the propriety of the Old King's retirement to the forest.

Dhritarashtra gives advice to Yudhisthira before leaving, then advises the citizens of their duties. The Old King performs ceremonial rituals in honour of the departed, and departs to the forest. The party arrive at Kurukshetra and establish a hermitage at Shata Yupashrama, and start severe austerities

as directed by Vyasa. Sage Narada and sage Parvata arrive at the hermitage, and Narada tells stories of great kings and others who did Tapasya in the hermitage in days gone by. Then he informs Shata Yoopa that Dritarashtra and Gandhari will depart to Kubera Loka after three years.

Yudhisthira and others are depressed at the departure of the aged elders, and constantly remember the youngsters killed in battle. The brothers, together with important citizens, go to the forest and visit the elders. They arrive at the hermitage and prostrate before the elders. Sanjaya introduces them to the sages who are living there.

Yudhisthira and Dhritarashtra converse for a while, then Yudhisthira enquires the whereabouts of Vidura. Someone tells him that Vidura is wandering in the forest, naked. At that moment, Vidura passes nearby, and Yudhisthira runs after him, calling out his name. So they. meet again. Vidura has a Veeta (piece of wood) in his mouth and his body is covered with dirt.* He is emaciated. After the meeting, Vidura casts off his human

इत्येवं ब्रूक्तस्तस्य जटी बीटामुखः कृशः ।

दिग्वाप्ता मलदिग्बाङ्गो वनरेणुसमुक्षितः ।।दूरादालक्षितः क्षत्ता तत्राख्यातो मही पतेः ।

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body through Yoga. A spirit emanates from his body and enters Yudhisthira, who returns to the hermitage and informs the elders of the happenings.

Yudhisthira then meets and converses with the sages residing in the neighbourhood. He lives at the hermitage for a month. One day, Vyasa, Narada and others arrive there, and Gandhari requests Vyasa to fulfil the desire of the blind king to see his departed children. Vyasa asks Kunthi her desire, and she expresses the wish to see Karna. Through the grace of Vyasa all these wishes are granted. Afterwards Vyasa and Narada talk and spend the night at the hermitage.

On the advice of Dhritarashtra, Yudhisthira and others leave for the capital.

One day, Dhritarashtra goes to the river, and while returning to the hermitage, is surrounded by a forest fire. He commands Sanjaya to escape, and enters the fire with Gandhari and ends his life.

Yudhisthira hears the news of the Old King's death and performs funeral rites. Narada comes and talks with him for a while. After the departure of the sage, Yudhisthira rules the land with care.

Interpreted in the Yogic way, the Ashrama. Vasa Parva tells of the proper time of establishing an Ashrama by the Yogi, and then begetting a son. to continue the line.

Vidura's spirit entering Yudhisthira has a special significance. Vidura is the intellect, the product of latent impressions (Purva Samskaras).

Until now this has actively functioned. After the attainment of the Samadhi stage direct contact with the Supreme Being is established and there is no necessity for guidance of Poorva Samskara. Hence it takes the vow of silence. At this stage it unites with the Prana with impressions of the current life for functioning in the next life. This point will become clear when we read the Eighteenth Book. We have observed how Yudhisthira declared to the Old King that he had absoltuely no ill-will towards him for the actions of his sons. When Duryodhana fell down wounded in the duel with Bhima, Yudhisthira assured Duryodhana that he had no hatred towards him for what he had done so far. The same Yudhisthira is shocked to find Duryodhana living in comfort in Vira Swarga when he enters the celestial regions, and indignantly remarks that he will not stay with Duryodhana. This clearly illustrates the effect of latent impressions that the Jiva carries with it in its journey from one abode to the other. These Samskaras are like dissolved impurities that pass through a filter in a liquid. They pass with the soul (the Prana) beyond a filter (death) into the life hereafter. An insignificant trace of dislike towards Duryodhana seems to have been impressed on Yudhisthira's mind, and its subtle influence is observed in the life beyond death.

The practice of keeping a wooden piece in the mouth appears to be an aid in observing Mowna, to prevent talkative persons from an unconscious outburst of answering somebody's question. Further,, such a practice gives notice to others that the person is observing the vow of silence and encourages them to help the Sadhaka.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Book XVI

MUSALA PARVA

The Sixteenth Book describes the fratricidal fight among the Yadavas, their extinction, and the departure of Sri Krishna to His original abode.

Yudhisthira lived happily in his capital, ruling his subjects wisely. One day he suddenly observes evil omens. A few days later news reaches him of the total extinction of the Yadava clan.

Once, the great sages Vishwamitra, Kanva, Narada and others arrived at Dwaraka. Sarana and other young men of Yadava nobility approached the sages taking Samba with them disguised as a woman, and questioned the sages thus: 'Sires, this lady is in the family way. She wishes to know the sex of the child she will give birth to. They thought that sages are simple souls and would not understand this trick.

The sages answered: "The lady will give birth to a pestle that will be the cause of wiping out the Yadava clan' They further said: 'Balarama will cast off the human shell on the seashore and enter the waters. Sri Krishna will be shot with an arrow by a hunter named Jara.'

The news of the sages' ourse of the Yadava clan reached Sri Krishna's ears. He became silent and mused on the inevitable.

Samba changed sex, became a woman and gave birth to an iron Musala (pestle). At Sri Krishna's command the Yadavas ground the pestle on the seashore and mixed the dust in sea-water. The iron dust took root on the seashore and reeds sprouted up there.. A small bit remained which they threw into the sea. A fish swallows this bit. The fish was caught by a fisherman in a net and the bit of iron found in its stomach was thrown out. A hunter picks it up and fixes it at the point of an arrow.

Sri Krishna then forbade all members of the Yadava clan to drink spirituous liquor from thenceforth. He declared that anyone trasgressing the command should be impaled on a stake.

Subsequently the Yadavas witness a series of ill omens. Sri Krishna observes them, too, and remembers the curse uttered by Gandhari at the side of her fallen son Duryodhana, that Sri Krishna should see the extinction of his clan before his departure from the world. Sri Krishna commands the Yadavas to go on a pilgrimage.

The Yadavas go to Prabhasa Tirtha. There they cook a number of delicious dishes and have a picnic. Then they drink spirituous liquor, and while intoxicated Yuyudhana ridicules Kritavarma on the way the Kurukshetra battle was fought - how warriors were killed when they were not ready to fight, how sleeping children were killed, and so on. An argument ensues. Kritavarma cuts off Yuyudhana's head with his sword, Then quarrels start amongst the other members of the party. They pluck out reeds from the seashore and start beating one another. The paste of the iron pestle mixed in the sea had become reeds on the seashore. The fight gets furious and they all die there.

Sri Krishna leaves his brother on the seashore and goes to Dwaraka. He then informs the elders that he can no longer stay there after the death of so

many of the Yadavas.. He expresses his desire to do Tapas, and requests the elders to go with the ladies to Indraprastha after Arjuna's arrival.

He returns to the seashore and observes a huge white snake emanating from Balarama's nose and entering the sea. Balarama's human body is lying there. Sri Krishna understands that the time has arrived for his own departure. He goes to the shade of a tree and reclines there, musing over the recent happenings..

A hunter named Jara comes there in search of prey. Fe sees Sri Krishna's foot from a distance and mistakes it for the head of a deer, and shoots an arrow. Then he comes near and discovers that he had shot Sri Krishna. He falls down at his feet.

Daruka, the charioteer who had brought Sri Krishna to the forest, goes to Hastinapura and informs the Pandavas of the happenings at Prabhasa Tirtha, the death of Sri Krishna, Balarama and the Yadavas. Arjuna arrives at Dwaraka and consoles the ladies and the elders. Vasudeva acquaints Arjuna of Sri Krishna's wish. He asks Arjuna to look aiter the womenfolk and wealth, then departs to the forest to end his own life. Arjuna arranges the funeral rites of Balarama, Sri Krishna and Vasudeva.

As soon as the party leave Dwaraka, a huge wave envelopes the city and submerges it in water.

On the way, Arjuna is beset by robbers who carry away all the valuables and the womenfolk. When the thieves attacked Arjuna, he lifted up his bow and tried to fight, but his arrows and weapons proved useless. He reaches Indraprastha with few of the Yadavas.

He crowns Vajra as king at Indraprastha and appoints other minor members of the Yadava household as different chiefs.

Rukmini and others offer their bodies to fire. Satyabhama and a few others go to the forest for . Tapasya.

Arjuna goes to Vyasa's hermitage and gets his Darshan. He tells Vyasa of the happenings at Dwaraka, and Vyasa informs him that the time has come for Yudhisthira and others to depart from' this world. Arjuna goes to Hastinapur and acquaints Yudhisthira of the happenings at Dwaraka.

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In the Musala Parva, the author of the Maha Bharata has described the process of the change of the old order at that time. The old has to make way for the new, and to do so, the old must cease: Some of the difficulties of this change-over are portrayed in this Parva. Even birth in a great family of which Sri Krishna was chief did not prevent the youngsters of the clan from behaving disrespectfully to the sages, and as a result the whole clan is cursed. They try to overcome the effect of the curse by grinding the iron pestle and throwing the paste into the sea. The filings sprout up as weeds which are used as weapons in the fight in which the Yadavas destroy each other. The lesser ones die in this way, and the noble ones leave the body through Yoga, as in the case of Balarama and Vasudeva. Jara the hunter is old' age, who shoots his arrow at Sri Krishna's foot.

This indicates the condition of the human body as the time for its destruction approaches. Old age (Jara, the hunter) shoots an arrow at the feet. Immediately the Indweller (Sri Krishna) prepares to leave the body.

As long as Yogiswara Krisnna is with Nara (in the human body) Arjuna can achieve everything. Once Sri Krishna leaves the body, the entire armoury of Arjuna is lifeless. The human span of life is useful as long as there is support and backing of the Supreme Being. Once the backing is withdrawn, the Tenant has to pack up and change the residence. This is what yasa informs Arjuna.

Sri Krishna is also known as Varshneya. The two parties in the fratricidal fight described in the Musala Parva are the Vrishnis and the Andhakas, the party of Sri Krishna and the party of the blind ones. The senses are the blind ones (Andhakas). Some among them are guided by the inner seven. As old age

advances the senses fight with each other and collapse one by one as if struck down by a lathi (Musala). A single blow with a lathi lays the opponent dead. Similarly one by one the senses fight amongst themselves and fall down in turn. Arjuna (physical energy) becomes helpless when the senior partner (the Paramatma) vacates his seat, when Jara the hunter shoots his poisoned arrow. The tenant gets notice to quit the residence. He prepares for departure. This preparation is described in the next book.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Book XVII

MAHA PRASTHANIKA PARVA

The Seventeenth Book begins with Janamejaya questioning Vyshampayana:

'Thus, after the fratricidal Musala Yuddha amongst the Vrishni and Andhaka clans and the departure of Sri Krishna to celestial regions, what did the Pandavas do?

Vyshampayana then narrates the following:

I

Hearing of the serious fighting amongst the Vrishnis, Yudhisthira, the Kaurava king, made up his mind to depart from this world. He spoke to Arjuna thus:

'Brother, Time, the reaper, digests all the elements. I bow to his might. You can also see Time's might. Uttering this, that son of Kunthi sat musing over Time's deeds. Arjuna supported his senior's sayings. Bhima and the other brtohers approved of their elder's decision.

Then they sent for Yuyutsu and handed over the kingdom to that son of Vyshya. The king was highly depressed and told Subhadra that Parikshit would rule at Hastinapura and Vajra at Indraprastha. The king instructs her not to swerve from Dharma in her duty.

Yudhisthira then performs Sraddhas for the departed according to the instructions of the scriptures. He then invites great sages and gives them delicious food as offering to Sri Hari.

Yudhisthira requests Kripa to look after Parikshit, invites ministers and heads of territories, and informs them of his decision to leave the world. They try to make him change his mind, but are unsuccessful. The king convinces all those assembled there of the necessity for his move, and starts making arrangements for the journey.

Meanwhile, Sahadeva observes disputes amongst the populace regarding distribution of property, transfer of land, and so on. There is greed to accumulate wealth, and other vices. Sahadeva concludes that the Kali Yuga (the iron age) has arrived. He informs the king of this state of affairs, who exclaims: 'O enough of this existence!"

Then the king removes all valuable jewels from. his body and wears bark cloth (Valkala). Bhima, Arjuna, the twin brothers and Draupadi also follow the king's action. All perform the rituals connected with the sacrificial fire and scatter the fire in the waters.

The ladies of the household begin to weep at the imminent departure of the brothers.

Now the brothers and Draupadi, clad in their bark cloth, appear as they were in days gone by when they were defeated in the gambling at dice play.

All the brothers are elated at the prospect of their journey to their original abode.

The king departs in a party of seven - the five brothers, Draupadi, the Black Beauty, is the sixth, and the dog that accompanies them is the seventh.

The citizens come with them a long distance, trying to dissuade them from proceeding, but they are unsuccessful. Then the citizens, return with Kripa and others. Uloopi the Naga Kanya enters the Ganges, and Chitrangada leaves for Manipura (Manalura Pura in southern recension).

The noble Pandavas and Draupadi fast for a day and start in an eastern direction. They travel over several countries, crossing hills, dales, lakes,, rivers and oceans.

Yudhisthira goes in front with Bhima just behind and Arjuna following. Then come the twin brothers behind Arjuna. Draupadi, the Black Beauty, the gem among women, is at the end, and the dog accompanies them.

In the course of time, the heroic ones arrive at the Red Sea. Arjuna has not yet cast away the Gandhiva, the gift of the gods. He cannot make up his mind to forsake the jewelled arrows and quiver.

On their way, the travellers see Agni across their path, in the shape of a colossal figure. The seven-tongued One (Saptarchi) addresses thus::

'O valiant sons of Pandu! Know that I am Payaka (another name of Agni). O noble scion of the Kuru lineage, I am Agni who destroyed the Khandava Vana in days gone by through the aid of Arjuna as well as Sri Krishnà (Narayana). Your brother has not given up the Gandhiva bow. Let him forsake it. It is of no use to you hereafter. The Discus of Sri Krishna has returned to its place. I fetched the Gandhiva from Varuna for the use of Arjuna. Let him return it to Varuna.'

Then all the brothers prevail upon Arjuna to forsake the Gandhiva and the quiver of arrows. He consigns them to the waters, then Agni disappears.

Now the heroic Pandava brothers continue on their journey.

They go in a southern direction, then turn towards north and reach the shore of the salty ocean. They then turn towards south and west. Then again they wander in the western direction and reach Dwaraka, surrounded by the ocean. Again they turn towards north and journey on. The souls established in Yoga were perambulating round the world.

II

Then the tranquil-minded travellers, journeying towards north, view Himalaya, the mighty mountain. They cross it and reach a sandy desert. Beyond that they see the Meru mountain. As the travellers embracing the path of Yoga plod on Yagyaseni (another name for Draupadi) slips from the path of Yoga and drops down. Seeing her fall, valourous Bhima questions his brother thus: The princess has never swerved from the path of virtue. Brother, tell me the reason why the Black Beauty has dropped to the ground..

rudhisthira, answering shima,, says sher nad: great partiality towards Arjuna, 0 noble one. She is reaping the fruit of her actions.'

The party proceed further without leoking behind.

After some distance, Sahadeva drops down. Bhima asks of Yudhisthira: 'Why has this son of Madri fallen down, who always served all of us without a trace of ego?'

Yudhisthira replies: 'He considered that none was equal to him in knowledge. This prince has fallen down on account of this fault.' Answering thus, Yudhisthira continued the journey with the remaining brothers and the dog.

Having seen the fall of the Black Princess and his brother Sahadeva, Nakula, who loved his brother exceedingly, got disturbed and fell down.

Bhima questions Yudhisthira on Nakula's collapse and Yudhisthira answers: Nakula had the belief that no one else could equal him in personality, hence

he has collapsed. He was feeling that he was the persun with the most beautiful personality. Leave him and come on, brother Vrikodara! (one with the wolf's hunger)'

Viewing the fall of the twins and Draupadi Swetavahana (another name of Arjuna — one whose chariot has pedigree white stallions: yokedy falls down in great sorrow. Viewnig the collapse of that valourous offspring of Indra, Bhima breaks. down completely and speaks to the king thus: I do not remember this brother uttering any false, hood at all. He has never lied, even to his enemies. Tell me the reason why he has failed in his Yoga.'

Yudhisthira replies: Arjuna boasted that he would conquer the Kaurava force single-handed. He could not act. up to his word. He has put all archers. to shame by not doing what he boasted. Such should not be the behaviour of a person desiring Perfection.'

Yudhisthira and Bhima proceed further, then Bhima falls down. He asks his senior: Brother, , your beloved brother, am falling down. Why is it so?"

Yudhisthira answers: You aré a glutton, and talk without minding the feeling of others. Hence you have collapsed. After saying this, Yudhisthira continues the journey, accompanied by the dog.

III

Then Indra, the celestial king, comes in his chariot, the sound of whose wheels echoed in the earth and celestial regions. He requested Yudhisthira to enter the chariot. Yudhisthira tells Indra that his brothers and beloved wife have fallen down behind and they should also accompany him.

Indra tells Yudhisthira that the others have reached heaven by casting off the mortal shell. Then Yudhitshira says to Indra that the dog has accompanied him so far faithfully: forsaking it would be unkind. It should be permitted to come in the chariot.

Indra replies: King, you have achieved immortality, and equality with me, and have obtained great benefits. Now come and enjoy the o pleasures of celestial life. Forsake the dog. There is nothing inhuman in this action.'

Yudhisthira says: 'Reverend Sir, you are asking a cultured person to do something unsuitable to his temperament. Let me have nothing to do with heavenly pleasures if I have to forsake a devotee to enjoy them.'

Indra says: 'Doglike qualities do not exist in the celestial realms. People addicted to anger lose all benefits of their austerities and good deeds. So, King, think well ere you take this move. Forsake the dog, there is nothing inhuman in this.'

Yudhisthira says: Forsaking a dependent is highly sinful. It is said that such an act is equal to killing a Brahmin. I would give up my life rather than forsake a devotee, a dependent, or one that has, in a destitute condition, sought refuge with me.'

Indra says: 'Good deeds (austerities, etc.) seen by a dog, are carried away by the spirits known as Krodha Vasha. Hence, forsake the dog. You will attain celestial regions by so doing. You formok your brothers and your beloved wife. You have attained the right to live in celestial realms through your great deeds. Why don't you forsake this dog?'

Yudhisthira says: 'It can never be said that there can be a union of the living and the departed ones.. I never forsook my brothers and wife as long as they were alive. To forsake. a soul that has sought refuge, to kill a woman, to carry off a Brahmin's property, to cheat a friend, O Indra, I consider these four as sins of equal level with forsaking a devoted dependent.'

Hearing this utterance of Yudhisthira, the great Dharma (who had taken the guise of the dog all along) addresses him thus, with love and regard Noble King, you are the fit son of your father. You have proved your noble birth through your feelings of sympathy and sense of right. Son, in days gone by, I tested you at the Dwaita Vana where your brothers had lost their lives after

drinking the water of the lake. You left your own brothers Bhima and Arjuna and elected that Nakula should live so that your mother and step-mother could each have a living son. Feeling that this dog was your dependent, you renounced entering the celestial car. Hence, O scion of the Bharata race, you have achieved the right to live in eternal realms. You have gained unrivalled position.'

Then sages and celestial beings arrive there in their chariots. Narada addresses Yudhisthira, praising his glorious deeds and inviting him to proceed and enjoy, eternal life. Yudhisthira refuses to enjoy anything if separated from his brothers. At this, Indra questions Yudhisthira's wisdom in thinking in the way of a mortal after reaching celestial regions: 'King, look at the great sages. This is Swarga.'

Yudhisthira emphatically declines to proceed further. He says that he will stay where his brothers are now.

• • •

Maha Prasthana means the Glorious Departure.
In Shanti Parva is told the story of a hunter named Lubdhaka. He goes hunting on a rainy day, and roams in the wilderness till dusk but gets no prey. Hungry and shivering, he seeks shelter under a banyan tree. A couple of doves live on the tree. The female bird asks her master to offer creature comforts to the human guest who has sought shelter at the entrance of their residence. The male bird goes off and fetches a burning flare and starts a fire with bits of wood from their nest. The hunter wards off the chill. The birds have nothing to feed the guest. The male bird thereupon falls into the fire and offers its own body as food. The female bird also follows her consort. Two spirits leave their bodies. Celestial messengers come with their cars and convey the couple to heavenly regions. Viewing all this, Lubdhaka becomes a changed man. He feels disgusted with his mode of living and fasts unto death. The incident is described as follows:

दृष्ट्वा तौ दंपती राजन्यचिन्तयत तां गतिम्

कीदृशेनेह तपसा गच्छेयं परमां गतिम्

इति बुद्धया विनिश्चित्य गमनायोश्चक्रमे

महाप्रस्थानमाश्रिय लुब्धक: पक्षिजीवच:

निश्चेष्टो मरुदाहारो निर्मम स्वर्गकांक्षया ।।

O King, looking at the couple he thought of their condition and what austerities did these perform to attain to glorious state... Thus deciding through his intellect he started to leave this world

Taking recourse to Mana Prasthana, Lubdhaka, that lived by kiling birds, became quiet, living on air with a desire to attain heaven.

Read as a literary work, the Maha Prasthanika Parva describes the journey of the seven travellers towards celestial regions. But, the impossible situations described in the text, and the meaning of the word Maha-Prasthana all tend to show that the chapters narrate the process of disintegration of the body, or the preparation of the five Pranas and Buddhi with the Jiva while leaving the body.

The story discribes how a dog accompanied the brothers on their journey. Nowhere else in the entire work so far is the dog mentioned. The travellers do not carry any arms, money or food. They are said to have journeyed over several countries and crossed lakes and oceans. They reach the Red Sea travelling eastwards.

In their journey, they go in single file with the one woman in the party at the tail end of the line. If this was an actual journey, they would have carried arms. How could they travel over so many countries without any provisions or food? In a normal journey no party would leave the woman in the rear - she would be in the centre of the line.

At the end of the First Chapter the description says that the travellers went towards the east, then towards the north, then south and west, then again towards the west, then north. Thus they were perarabulating round the earth. This portrays a condition of great uneasiness and disturbed temperament. The next chapter begins with the lines: 'Then the tranquil-minded ones,, established in Yoga, viewed the glorious mountain Himavan." When they were aware of their destination, why should they roam about like this? Could they become tranquil-minded all of a sudden after wandering all round the globe?

All these questions clearly show that the narrative of the journey of the seven is allegorical. It describes the departure of the seven inner ones at the time of changing the body. Now, about the dog. The narrative says that Dharma came in the guise of a dog to show the travellers their path. Why should Dharma assume the guise of an unclean animal like the dog?

At the moment of leaving the human body, the tenant can carry nothing with him. All the gold he has accumulated remains in the cash chests*

कान्यो धनं प्रेत गतस्य भुङ्ने वयांसि चालोक्य शरीर धातून्

द्वाभ्यामयं सह गच्छत्यमुत्र पुण्येन पापेन च वेष्ट्यमानः ।।

अनु म्य विनाशान्ते निवर्तन्ते ह बान्धवाः

अग्नौ प्रक्षिप्य पुरुषं ज्ञानयः सुहृदरुयथा ।।

Relatives carry the body to the cremation ground, place it on the funeral pyre and return. Only the Punya and Papa good deeds and sinful acts that he has committed throughout his life accom- pany the traveller to the next world. As the time of departure approaches, these acts. of his come there and get ready to accompany him like a dog. The dog is the symbol of good acts that lead human beings to heaven, and also the evils that lead them towards hell.

Describing the philosophy of death, Sanatsujata tells Dhritarashtra in the Udyoga Parva:

यमनवे के मृत्युमनो अन्य माहु आत्मावासं अमृत ब्रह्मचर्य

पितृलोके राज्यमनुशास्ति देवः शिवः शिवानां भशिवो अशिवानां अस्यादेशान्निस्मरते नराणां क्रोध प्रमादां लोभरूण मृत्युः ।।

(अनत्सुजातीय)

Yama, the same who is addressed as Mrityu (Death), Amrita (the immortal), Atma Avasam (the indweller), Brahmacharyam (celibacy) he rules in the land of the tncients. He is good to the righteous and terrible to the sinners. At his command, death in the form of anger, heedlessness and greed carries off human beings.

The dog has all these three evil qualities. In addition, the dog is endowed with four good qualities, which, if practised by a human being, lead to Immortality. They are: a medicinal tongue, a distinguishing nose, ever watchfulness, and firm devotion to the Master.

Any person intent on journeying in the path towards perfection should have these four good qualities. His words should be sweet like a balm so that they soothe the wounds in people's hearts. The tongue should not be a lancet tongue. The pilgrim must have the capacity to distinguish between good and evil - a distinguishing nose. He should be ever watchful of slipping in the path, and lastly, he should have firm devotion to the Master — the creator. These four qualities lead a man towards Eternal Life, and the three evil qualities lead him to hell. Amongst animals, the dog has these good and evil qualities. Dharma assumed the role of a dog to show the path. The dog's presence is symbolic of Punya and Papa - good deeds and sins accumulated in life.

The directions east, west, north and south have specific spiritual meaning in epics and Itihasas.
Journey towards the south means towards the abode of the ancients (the Pitri Loka), Towards north, means towards the celstial realms. Towards east is towards progress. The dog's presence at the time of departure is the vision of the commissions and omissions throughout life which are visible at the last moment. Then the Jiva is disturbed and starts thinking of its future. It journeys towards the east and reaches the Red Sea - the sea at the horizon at the time of sunrise. This reference means that the Jiva goes towards the east searching guidance. Amongst sun worshippers there is a practice of gazing at the rising sun continuously, which is said to give the power of divining one's future.

While the Yogi is sitting in Padmasan, to cast: off the body, the Jiva, carried by the Prana, runs towards the east up to the horizon, followed by the other four Vayus (the brothers) and Buddhi (wife of the five). On the way they are stopped by Agni.: In the verse, Agni is. named Saptarchi (the seven-tongued one). This Saptarchi assumes the Taijasa form while burning the Khandava Vana (I have already described the significance of the Khandava Vana Dahana — the wilderness of pleasure.) Saptarchi says he got the Gandhiva bow from Varuna for the use of Partha (Arjuna). This Varuna is the one said to live at the summit of the Meru Mountain. While the Mountain Meru is an imaginary one to geographers searching for it, on a physical map, it is a real one to the Yogi. The spinal column is Meru Danda, and Meru is the summit of the spinal column where it ends in the head. Varuna is said to live here. Gandhiva is not a Shastra, but an Astra — a weapon used through incantations of sacred Mantras. It may be considered as some type of Siddhi achieved through withdrawing the senses from their objects.
A person easily gives away his movable and immovable properties at the time of his approaching departure from this world, but he does not easily part with any Siddhis or special Upasanas. wishing to find a suitable Adhikari to give initiation of the Upasana. But as the last moment approaches, these Upasanas are a hindrance in the journey. He has got to get rid of them. It is a practice amongst the orthodox to arrange for the gift of a milch cow as the journey's end approaches. This is named Utkramana Go-Dana - the gift of a

cow at the moment of the soul getting ready to leave the body. The giver of the cow is obliged to repeat certain Mantras at this moment in the ears of the milch cow. One would not be far from the truth if one suggested that this is done to give the departing person a chance to repeat his Upasana Mantas in the ears of the cow, and thus become free. It is said that if sacred Mantras which have been practised are repeated in the ear of a cow, they have no further effect upon the person.

After getting rid of the Gandhiva bow, the travellers journey towards the south, i.e., the soul went as far as the eastern horizon but could not find any relief. Now it turned towards the south — towards the abode of the ancients — and sought guidance from the ancestors of the line. They ask if their debts are cleared - Pitri Rina is cleared by getting progeny. The soul turns west and shows the shadow it is leaving behind. Feeling confident of support of the elders it turns towards the north, but the thought of the future of the children being left. behind hinders progress. The soul looks towards the west and the gaze reaches up to Dwaraka — the abode of the Supreme Being at the far end. The travellers are free from all worry and anxiety, so their mind is tranquil now. This condition The traveller is now free from all worry and anxiety, so his mind is tranquil now. This condition is described in the first verse of the second chapter of the Seventeenth Book,

As already explained, the travellers are: the five winds of the human body (the Pancha Pranas), the Buddhi (intellect), and the Prana Vayu is the vehicle for the journey of the Jiva from one place-to another. The Buddhi or intellect collapses first, then the other Vayus exit, one by one. The voice goes. The Samana Vayu which is between the Prana and Apana acts like a knot between the two. The moment it drops down, no food can go down the tube. Then the Vyana Vayu drops down. The body loses all its lustre and loses all sense of touch. Then the Apana Vayu exits, and as a result of Yogic practice the Jiva departs through the opening created at the cranium, and goes off on the last stage of the great journey.

Indra meets the Jiva with his chariot. For ordinary mortals, as the scriptures have described, the messengers of Yama (Lord of Death) or the messengers

of Vishnu or Siva come and conduct them at this stags to the region to which they are entitled, but an exclusive honour is reserved for the Yogi. Indra comes in his chariot to meet him and conduct him to his region. As long as a person performs austerities, Indra is antagonistic to him, fearing that he will usurp his throne through the power of his Tapasya. Once a person renounces the pleasures of the three worlds and takes the vow, Indra is highly pleased, as by this action the Yogi assures him that he is no longer a candidate for the Indra-Padavi. In gratitude, Indra watches for the chance to serve him at the time of his great departure. He comes with his chariot and conducts the traveller to his abode.

The entire Maha Bharata describes thetests to which the soul is subjected in its path towards perfection. The test of Yudhisthira by Dharma is one such test. Yudhisthira's treatment of the dog is a practical illustration of the teachings of Sri Krishna in verse 18, chapter V of the Gita:

विद्याविनय सम्पन्नं ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनी

शुनिचैव श्वपाकं च पण्डिता समदर्शिनः ।।

The learned one has equal vision towards a scholar endowed with culture, a priest, an elephant, a dog, and the untouchable who eats the dog.

In fact, the Maha Bharata contains many such practical examples of the Lord's teaching.

The narrative in the second chapter of the Seventeenth Book need not be kept on a pedestal as being only useful to great Yogis at their last moments. It can be used as a model for every human being desiring perfection.

Pride of valour, personality and intelligence, along with hunger are born with every person; they are common to every mortal. Partiality is a quality that a man acquires after marriage. So long as he is unmarried, he introduces

himself as the son of so and so.. After marriage, the feeling of I-ness and mine-ness envelope him, and partiality attaches itself to him.

If a person kéeps these unavoidable evils under his control, as Yudhisthira had kept his brothers and wife under his control, and if he keeps the dog in view to remind him of the qualities that lead him to heaven or hell, and then travels on, in the Life's Journey, his journey will become a glorious journey.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Book XVIII

SWARGA AROHANA PARVA

When Yudhisthira arrives at the celestial regions he sees Duryodhana there, amidst all glory and pomp. Yudhisthira gets indignant and enumerates Duryodhana's evil acts. He refuses to stay there with Duryodhana, and requests sage Narada to show him where his brothers are.

When he does not find Karna and the other relatives, Yudhisthira asks the celestial residents to allow him to live with his relatives, wherever they may be staying.. At the instructions of the celestial beings, messengers conduct Yudhisthira to the region of hell. Here, he is overpowered by the stink and the cries of distress, and unable to stay there even for a moment. e tries to return when he hears familiar voices calling him and begging him to stay there for a while. Yudhisthira enquires who they are. The voices answer saying they are Karna, BHima and the others. Yudhisthira is highly shocked to find his relatives in this sad plight while Duryodhana is in pomp and glory. He feels it is like a bad dream. Then Yudhisthira turns towards the messengers and asks them to inform Indra that he has decided to stay there with his relatives. The messengers convey the news to Indra.

Then Yama, Indra and others arrive there, highly pleased at Yudhisthira's behaviour. In a moment, the ugly sight of hell disappears.. Yudhisthira questions Dharma, who replies that this was Indra's Maya to test Yudhisthira. Then he tells Yudhisthira that Duryodhana is entitled to live in the hero's corner (Vira Swarga) for having fought valiantly and laid down his life on the battlefield: The results of good or evil deeds, whichever happen to be less, are enjoyed first. Duryodhana had a. little good to his credit, so he had its benefit first. Yudhisthira uttered an apparent lie in the case of Drona, hence he had to view the sight of hell. Dharma invites him to come and look at his brothers and Draupadi. Yama then shows Yudhisthira's relatives and describes the different celestial beings of whose Amsa they are.

This last book, the eighteenth, conveys an important lesson, namely the way in which Samska-ras (latent impressions) get inscribed in subconscious plane and force themselves up at a later date. Time and again Yudhisthira had assured Duryodhana that he bore no ill-will towards him. When Dhritarashtra sought Yudhisthira's consent to go and reside in the forest, Yudhisthira assured the Old King that he had no rancour in his mind on account of the evil acts of his son. Yet, Yudhisthira is indignant when he finds: Duryodhana in Vira-Swarga, the hero's corner, in the midst of pomp and comfort, and refuses to stay there with him. Duryodhana had laid down his life on the battlefield after heroic fighting, and was entitled to a place in the Vira Swarga. But the evil actions of Duryodhana during life-time had left their subtle impressions in Yudhisthira's mind, and produced this indignant outburst.

This teaches us how careful we should be throughout life in guarding against the danger of undesirable impressions which may get embedded in the subtle body.

The entire epic literature composed by Vyasa Bhagavan is concerned with leading humanity in the path towards perfection. The Maha Bharata has a special status, since it serves as a multipurpose scripture to guide the seeker in whatever path he wishes to take. The seeker has to choose the path most suited to his temperament and place in life. This will be easy only when one

is guided by the Lord. The great author has emphasised the importance of observing one's Dharma in the last chapter of the Maha Bharata.

But he has declared in an earlier chapter that where SriKrishna resides, Dharma is there, and where Dharma resides, prosperity is there. To get Sri Krishna's grace, the only path is that expressed in the concluding portion of the Gita, where Sri Krishna enjoins Arjuna:

मन्मना भब मद्भक्यो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु

मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसिमं ।।

सर्व धर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज

अहं त्वा सर्व पापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ।।

Fix thy mind on me, be devoted to me, sacrifice to me. Thou shalt como oven to me, truly do I promise unto thee (for) art dear to me. Abandoning all others, take refuge in me alone, I wwill liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.

-Gita XVIII 65-66.

Unconditional surrender is advocated in the Gita, while other paths Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, are explained. It is the Lord that guides the traveller at every step.

The life of the Pandavas is an example of total surrender to the Lord. Sri Krishna guided them, protected them, and aided them at every step.

May He give us all the intelligence and firm determination to surrender to Him and gain His grace.

HARI OM TAT SAT

EPILOGUE

It is the earnest desire of the writer that this modest volume may start a new trend in studies of the Maha Bharata. For a great many years, the Bhagavad Gita section hs rightly attracted enormous attention, and has transformed the lives of many people through its magnificent exposition of the different paths of Yoga. It has, however, been very much isolated from its context, and it has been fashionable to refer to Gita as an 'interpolation' in the Maha Bharata. It is to be hoped that the discovery that the whole of the Maha Bharata is also to be regarded as a Yoga treatise will make it possible to see the whole of this great work in its true perspective and with all its refinements.

The present volume has done little more than give a brief introduction to this wider interpretation, but further study will disclose some of the finger shades and subtleties that should not be presented prematurely. The aim of the writer has been to provide something in the nature of a skeleton key by means of which others may unlock a never-ending richness in their own time and in their own way.

For those readers who approach the Maha Bharata for the first time, the synopsis of the main action may be found useful, as the wide canvas and tremendous action of this epic often, deter many from closer examination in the absence of a general guide. It is felt that the usual method of abridgement is unsatisfactory, as it does not do justice to the grand language of the original, which should be studied in its own right. A brief synopsis may be the means of leading new readers to the original.

Finally, the writer wishes to stress one very important point. It has never been his aim simply to open a new field for academic discussion. The Maha Bharata, like the Gita which is a glorious part of it, is a treatise for living, and not for sterile discussion, commentary and controversy The limited research contained in this volume has been a great inspiration to the author over a period of many years, and he is anxious to share it with other aspirants on the spiritual path.

The path towards perfection is a very real one, and not a concept for intellectual discussion. The real lessons of the Maha Bharata are for day to day application in the spiritual path.

May the Lord give us all the strength, courage, and clear understanding that we need in this path.

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